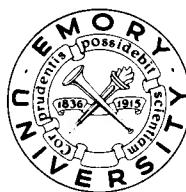


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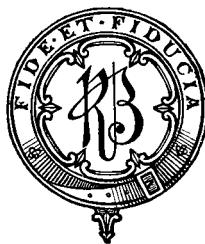


THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

CHAPTER I.

THE few strides before a leap may sometimes attract attention to the style in which we get over it, and create a corresponding interest in our fortunes on the other side, and such, perhaps, may be the effect of a few words of preface on the course of a history. But experiments in cold blood are apt to be dangerous, and we have seen occasions on which it might have been well to remember the admonition to a poor player, to “leave making faces and begin.” We therefore commence acquaintance with our fellow traveller through a long journey by expressing a civil hope that he will not find it fatiguing.

Having thus broken the ice and exchanged a few pleasant observations on the land we are leaving, we gradually slide into the subject that most engages our mind, and wonder whether he has ever remarked that amongst the well grown and elegantly got up habitués of Pall Mall and thereabouts, the

prevailing expression is that of some bearded young lion brooding over the poisoned barb of the Hot-tentot.

Of course, he can never remember to have seen amongst them the blithe sparkling eye, or to have heard the natural accent of mirth so common to the class immediately below them, and supposes that such characteristics are suppressed by the high society in which they move—that happy faces are not compatible with good breeding, and that moody silence and imperturbable features are the most infallible signs of lofty position. We quite agree in his suppositions, and fall into rather a long discussion of why they should be facts ; during which we hope his own good breeding will keep him awake.

True content, we think, would be puzzled to put on that suicidal look and stoic indifference to everything that excites an opposite development in the rest of the world ; and the young blood that rises like a spring from the mountain top, would be sure enough to rebel against any social engineering that would dam it up in stagnation. We must seek other cause for these clouded brows than incapacity to struggle against the mode of May Fair and the club in St. James's ; and if so, what can it be ? Why is this handsome young potentate of the peerage, or overgrown gentry, to be seen, from four o'clock to sunset, framed and glazed in his club window like some fine picture that wants the last touch to the corner of the mouth, and the last dot of light to the now expressionless eye ? Why does

he stalk the street like his tailor's advertisement, and chronicle his want of thought in lazy articulation that would scarce do credit to a jackdaw ? See him lounging at Tattersall's and making up the only book in his library—does he brighten when he wins, or darken when he loses ? See him lolling by the rails of Rotten Row—does he care one puff of the cigar that takes the colour from his cheek and spoils his appetite, for the fair horse-breaker who wonders what on earth my lord can be thinking about ? She would be very clever if she could find out.

And yet my lord has no want of education to supply him with thoughts, for he ran the gauntlet at Eton, and would have been backed for a "double-first" at Oxford, had he only not happened to be a gentleman commoner at Christ Church, and the fellow student of a class who aspired to honour in the science of doing nothing. It is just this study that overpowers his brain, for the more his capabilities the more his want of some necessity upon which they may be exercised ; some decided purpose and defined occupation to form a starting and a winning-post in the great race of life, and inspire and direct emulation for a creditable place. Without these, our thoroughbred is nowhere, and we may leave him to his own calculation of what he is worth.

No wonder if he and his like have a look of care—it would be a wonder if they had not ; but it does appear remarkable that so many of them have never penetrated the cause of it, or listened to some

one of the ten thousand occasions on which it has been told them. We never knew more than a single sufferer who evinced the slightest suspicion that the world did not go with him quite as Nature meant it should ; and with this exception we propose to extend our acquaintance whilst he looks about for a remedy.

Our friend's name was James Crowley. He was well born and well educated, and, as he was an only son and inherited all the wits of his family—and their wealth into the bargain—the young ladies of the London season used to give a decided opinion that he was very clever. His face and figure would have removed all doubt, had any been entertained, for the first was of the choicest bronze, overshadowed and skirted by a dark forest, of which Mr. Truefit was the ranger, and the latter exhibited five feet eleven inches of as good drawing as we usually find on the walls of the Royal Academy. And then one fair waltzer could not refrain from whispering to another that the nose was perfect Grecian ; and the other would whisper back that the dark eye was just the Helicon that inspired Sappho.

In fact, James Crowley (or Jim Crow, as his familiars and lovely lips, in secret, were accustomed to call him) was undeniably a handsome fellow, and very much the more so from the indolence which had never found it out. His age was about five-and-twenty, but his experience in the world, which means a radius of half-a-mile round the Duke of Wellington's statue in Piccadilly, was great enough

to break him down. He had given up dancing because he had danced with everybody, and he rarely dined out because there they were again. As to falling in love, that was entirely out of the question, for he was unreasonable enough to require a heart at first hand, and where was such a Kohinoor to be found ? The juvenile balls had made it unattainable even in the nursery ! Life, he said, was a barren wilderness, and the den he dwelt in was the Clarendon Hotel.

All that his compeers did to sustain their energies he had tried over and over again, excepting that he had never tried the resources of Crockford's, which was then in its glory. He had a distaste for gambling, which was thought unaccountable—a weakness which would not suffer him to ruin the peace of mind of those who were not overburthened with it, and an illogical way of reasoning that, such being the case, it would be no great mark of wisdom to risk his own. In other ways he was said to be much too lavish, though his fortune stood sound enough to resist the tide that dispersed many another ; and as there was no chance of his being ruined and unable to accommodate a good fellow with a stray hundred or two, he was universally admitted to be a very good fellow himself.

Such was the mode in which he had passed the diplomatic seasons of dowagers and fair attachés ever since he left college. The dog-days were slept out upon the deck of some marvel of a yacht, and the winter in careering over the fences about Melton, or standing sentry in alarming battues for some

distinguished dealer in Leadenhall Market. His indifference made him a good shot, and he rode forward because it was too much trouble to crane.

At last he could bear this waste of days no longer. He felt that he was living for nobody and nothing, and suddenly announced to his club companions, one evening about the end of July, that he had recommended himself a total change, and was going to start the very next morning in search of something new. His resolution was opposed by many doubts of his sanity, but perhaps there might have been individuals elsewhere to pronounce it the wisest he had ever made.

So thoroughly had he been worn out by the world of fashion, that he had taken no sort of consideration about any world he might adopt in place of it, and his course was determined by a letter which chanced to turn up in his hasty packing. It had come some days ago from the only dear relation he had, and this was the Countess of Goldfield, many years his elder, and widow of the lord lieutenant of a county some hundred and odd miles from London. Lord Goldfield had been dead four or five years, leaving a son to inherit the family estate in Yorkshire, and two daughters, who had both been happily married in the early part of the previous season, on which event Lady Goldfield had relinquished her leading station in London life, and betaken herself to the splendid solitude of Goldsworthy Park. It was a tempting direction for his pilgrimage, and he decided upon taking it, though

it involved a visit not quite so tempting, but not to be avoided, on the same road.

When the next nine o'clock express train was screaming for its passengers, and the usual anxious crowd were screaming for their places, would anybody have imagined that the handsome young man who stood so calmly deliberating amongst them, in his well-fitting travelling dress, was no other than our friend James Crowley ! There at nine o'clock ! Could there have been a greater proof of his utter horror of everything he was leaving ?

He seemed to be making up his mind as to which of the carriages would subject him to the least affliction of fellow travellers, when his eye was attracted to the window of the one opposite by the burst of a shrill voice, which very much resembled the sudden disturbance of a hen roost. It was high in disapproval of a porter, who, it appeared, was carrying a basket of ducks topsy-turvy, notwithstanding the public announcement that they were real Aylesburys, and had gained the first prize at the poultry show.

"All right, ma'am," said the porter, "I'm going to put them in the luggage van."

But the luggage van was not to be heard of. They always travelled by first class, and so did the beautiful game cock, which had been highly commended, and just been insured for a hundred pounds.

"'Gainst the rules, ma'am," replied the barbarian swinging the important passenger over his shoulder, in spite of all expostulations, human and gallinaceous, and charging through the amused lookers-on.

But here Crowley proved his better breeding by stepping forward and politely assuring the excited lady that he would see her treasures placed out of danger, and return to make his report.

This was very good-natured, for it was certainly not called for by any remarkable fascination, either personal or decorative. In the latter respect the lady was rather grotesque. She was a mixture of many fashions, all plume and prismatic streamer, with a hey-day twinkle in her eye, not out of keeping with a sharp projecting profile, but very much so with the tell-tale pepper-and-salt of a wild and very youthful coiffure. Fifty odd years are secrets very hard to keep, and frank confession saves a deal of trouble. Upon the whole, this was certainly not quite the companion we should have picked out for our friend's comfort, but it was difficult to know what would suit him best, as nothing had ever suited him yet. That he regarded her with unusual attention was not at all surprising. Perhaps he had been taken by the discovery of something really new.

"How very handsome!" she exclaimed to some one on the seat beyond her. "How polite! how elegant! How much he reminds me of our brilliant visitors in Red Lion Square, before I married and became hum-drum in the country! I should have thought that other gentleman, who was standing by his side, and is now standing by himself, might also have stepped forward in a case so urgent; but he does nothing but look free and easy at this carriage, as if we were intimate acquaintance. I'm

sure I don't know what he can see in me to be so particular. There ! did you see him then ? I admire that, indeed. Ha ! ha !"

The person alluded to had certainly an air of self-sufficiency. He was much over-dressed in a sporting, or flash style, and though not bad-looking, hardly gave the assurance of a true gentleman. He was something under the middle age, but with rather a full and flabby habit, which more than hinted a life of dissipation and not over refined society. Crowley himself had remarked him, and wondered what could keep him stationary on the platform, as he seemed to be neither a new arrival nor a projected traveller, and to belong to no party of either description. Like his fair friend in the carriage, he had noticed a very attentive look in her direction, and imagined them to be acquainted. For some cause or other he had been a little curious on the subject, but he had no time for another look at him when he returned with his promised report, for the bell was sounding, and he was only just soon enough to seat himself in front of the flounces when the train began to move. He had not been excited to such an exercise of gallantry within his recollection, and was almost as much astonished at himself as overwhelmed by the torrent of affability to which he had made himself a victim.

CHAPTER II.

TO say the truth, however, Mr. Crowley had no very particular cause for astonishment, for his civility had not been quite so disinterested as he had made it appear, and might have been altogether ascribed to that other personage in the background. What he had done was by way of making acquaintance, and obtaining something more than a glimpse, for that other was the very loveliest girl he had ever seen in his life. At least, so he had thought, for she had not given him a full view of her dark, downcast eyes, till the train started. At that moment they flashed up in the direction of the person we have noticed as having no object in the bustle, and the thought became a conviction: his first fit of admiration was simultaneous with his first tingle of jealousy. The stranger's eye, however, though it followed them with a cool smile of assurance, conveyed no apparent farewell, and was perhaps only led by the usual interest which attends departing travellers. The flash might have had no meaning in it, and he tried to believe so.

The many-coloured elder lady strove hard to assist

him in forgetting everything but herself. They had hardly passed the first mile before she had given him the history of all that had tempted her to London, and all that was taking her back to the country. How she had made the most distinguished exhibition in the Poultry Show. How that the parentage of her highly commended chanticleer was a deeply interesting mystery. How that he had been presented as an egg to the late Mr. Cantelot, of Leicester Square, and hatched by steam; and how she had taken him by the wing and brought him up morally, and provided for him in the matrimonial way, till the young army of his sons had killed all the cocks, and tempted away all the widows in the parish. Then again there were half-a-dozen ladies of his harem expecting to increase their families, and she was obliged to hasten home to attend them; and then again she had taken all the Aylesburys away from the disconsolate drake, and there was no saying but he might be driven to adopt imprudent habits in the village duck-pond. And here she threw her head back and projected a rather downy chin, and laughed in a manner very knowing and confidential.

Crowley might have found it difficult to reply in a vein satisfactory to both ladies, but the fact was he was sensible of nothing but some necessity for a moral shake of his head, for his faculties of hearing and seeing had been reserved for his younger neighbour exclusively. But she had not spoken a word, or taken her attention a second time from some trifling piece of railway literature.

And here again he found himself a little puzzled. He observed that she never turned over a page, and instead of reading her book, was busied with her own thoughts. That they were not of an ordinary nature was evident from the changing expression of her countenance.

The more he looked the more he wondered at the transparent purity of complexion and the perfect symmetry of her features. The train was carrying him fast towards the land of poesy—wherever that blessed land may be—and he hardly knew whether he was running away from his wits, or only just overtaking them. But we must have a care how we follow him, lest we lose sight of our own, for lofty brows and eyes of blackest blue are dangerous things to think about, and there was once a time when we would willingly have twined a lock of dark chestnut braids to—well, well, it is very long ago, and we hope we are wiser now. What could have been the subject of this young lady's deep study? Had it anything to do with that gentleman we saw on the platform? Nonsense! if they had any knowledge of each other would they not have said farewell?

The only evidence she had given that she sometimes heard the conversation, was a slight blush of vexation, with now and then a tremour over her countenance, as if it were a hard matter to refrain from laughter;—not very surprising considering her laughing years, which did not seem to be more than twenty. But the gleam was momentary, and the shadows were more settled. A lively elastic nature

was evidently pressed down by some influence so weighty, that a struggle seemed only to produce a graver contrast. What could it be? In one so beautiful there might have been excuse for an over consciousness of self-importance, but this was not the case. Her beauty was the last thing in her thoughts, for never had less pains been taken for adornment. Her dress, indeed, was an emphatic rebuke to the gaudy occupant of the adjoining seat, consisting only of white muslin and a black gossamer scarf, a delicate straw hat being thrown on another seat, in consequence of the summer heat. Her figure might have been called slight by those who estimate attractions by the weight, but it was charmingly rounded, and appeared to be a trifle over the common height.

When would she speak! Would her voice accord with all the rest, or was there yet some stroke of disenchantment? The little straw hat was destined to settle the question. It had been some time trotting towards the edge of the seat, and at last the motion of the carriage sent it over. Crowley picked it up tenderly as he would have touched an air-bubble, and was very solicitous to be assured it had not been crushed.

"Oh, no," replied such soft tones as he had never heard in his opera box. "It is too light to mind a tumble."

Mr. Crowley had been "very much alarmed."

She bowed and smiled. What an expression in those pure and high-bred lips! What a row of treasures they revealed, and what a heart a man

must have possessed if they had not snapped off the best part of it! Could this fair star be a spark from the blazing firework by her side? Quite impossible! At all events the truth of the matter should be arrived at somehow; but whilst the means were in a deep state of puzzle the distant crow of the "highly commended" was heard in the luggage van, and his mistress crowded in response.

"Ah, there's my dear orphan of Leicester Square! He knows he is on the road to his domestic perch, and cannot restrain his spirits. Poor anonymous fellow! how I wish I could give him a name, now that he is so celebrated, to distinguish him from the vulgar plebeians of the—the farm-yard."

And here again she threw back her head and laughed immoderately at some other word which had very nearly escaped her.

"Oh, goodness me! now I think of it, a lady in our village has christened her donkey after a favourite gentleman, and it always brings him to her recollection, you know. It is so pleasant! What shall I call my pet? How I wish you would be his god-father."

"With great pleasure," replied Crowley. "He is perfectly welcome to go halves in all the names I have.—If we put them together, I think they will be very appropriate. Suppose we call him Jim Crow?"

"Charming! The very thing! Jim—what did you say?"

"Jim Crow, aunt," replied the younger lady,

looking up from her book, and now laughing in earnest.

"Aunt!" ejaculated Crowley to himself. "Laud we the gods! not mamma! Aunt by marriage, of course; it could never be by blood. Her uncle must be something very different—though heaven help his taste."

The firework was going off in a louder key.

"How exquisite! How very clever! How just the thing! How flattered he will be to have half your name, and how he will burn to know the other half! What enquiries he will make of all the cocks and hens in the neighbourhood! My name is Bloomer, and my husband is the vicar of the parish, and this is my niece, Miss Longland; and everybody will be so anxious to hear all about our gifted fellow-traveller, who gave half his name to my favourite. Oh yes, indeed I think so."

This was rather a strong attempt to examine Mr. Crowley in the first question of the catechism, but he chose to be thought a dunce, and made no satisfactory answer, whilst Miss Longland endeavoured to start another subject. The dunce was much beholden both to the cause and consequence, and, the ice once broken, slid wilfully into that troubled stream which "never did run smooth."

He had a tact in conversation which, without allowing it to become intrusive, was adroit, when he chose, in leaving no break for its discontinuance; so that the slight observation which had been dropped in his aid in reference to the next station, was naturally followed by a polite question from

one who professed to be a stranger on the line. This could not be answered in less than a whole sentence, during which our friend was opportunely reminded that the scene they were passing was of some importance in history. His listener became more attentive. She had read the passage he mentioned ; and then, of course, he ventured a few remarks upon the book, from which the young lady was led on to a diffident admission that she had read a great many more. So had Mr. Jim Crow, who now found his studies highly remunerative, inasmuch as they helped him to the information that she was highly educated. Her parents must be persons of elegant mind and good station. What on earth could have induced them to confide her to such protection ?

But Mrs. Bloomer had no fancy for indulging a conversation in which she could neither lead nor follow, and very soon kicked over the traces and pulled the other way.

“ Books and histories,” she said, “ might be very well for people who could do nothing but read, but if all the world could do nothing better, a pretty world it would be. For her part, she preferred exerting her mind on things that would make her a subject for histories, and a good example for the do-nothings ; though for that matter she didn’t know that example ever did much good. She had never followed it herself, and believed nobody else did ; and if that was the case, what was the use of history books ? The world always did more harm than good, and the least said is the soonest mended.

As for accomplishments, and all that stuff, what was poetry but sham sentimentality that would be still more ridiculous if it were true? What was painting but the ghost of roses and lilies without their scent? What was music but Italian operas which nobody understood, and which made everybody tell falsehoods by pretending they did? What, she would like to know, were such fine things but chaff for admiration, which was not worth the catching? They had no need to set such traps in Mrs. Bloomer's maiden days, when her father was attorney-general, and secretary for the Board of Guardians. All the music they wanted then was 'Off she goes;' and all the dancing was down the middle and up again, and the business was done."

"I've no doubt of it, Mrs. Bloomer. I'm sure it would have done mine. But I believe the fashions in those days were more adapted for agile displays of grace; and, of course, you were always in the fashion."

"Oh, of course; short and scanty—just low enough to—ha! ha! and just high enough to—ha! ha! ha! with a waist just under—don't be inquisitive—and a large bow between the shoulders, and a sash that reached six inches below our petti—never mind! In those days dancers were dancers, and looked as if they could fly, and tabor and pipe couldn't go fast enough, though we had never less than forty or fifty couple to go down. Goodness me! how we used to fan ourselves and our partners behind the door! Dancing was dancing then, and not swimming, as it is now."

"So I have read, Mrs. Bloomer, in an excellent account of the dances at a place called Kirk Allo-way, where the dancing and music were quite of another world."

"Oh, quite. I used to go to all the grand balls there, and the master of the ceremonies was most polite in bringing me no end of partners. Poor dear old man! I was such a favourite!"

The points and angles which composed the attractions of Mrs. Bloomer betrayed themselves through her elaborate costume quite visibly enough to present a pleasant picture of a half-swathed skeleton, footing it fast and furious with a rampant caco-demon; and as Crowley chanced to turn his eye upon the niece, he could not help discovering that her accomplishments, so emphatically denounced, had been guilty amongst other offences of reading the account in question. The consequence was an irresistible fit of laughter, which Mrs. Bloomer fortunately accredited to her own graphic mode of narration, and the jealousy which at first had some appearance of tartness, took an amiable turn. Perhaps, had she been less intent upon herself, she might have been less satisfied by detecting a certain odd sensation in her admirers that they were, in some sort, involved in a confidential understanding. Nothing could have pleased one of the parties better, though it raised a slight blush in the other, and might have carried us into a fanciful enquiry of whether any circumstance in nature is too minute to produce its little family of consequences. But Mrs. Bloomer began another down

the middle and up again, over our tender shoots of philosophy, and turned us into mere reporters.

“Ah,” she concluded, “those were happy times! The hey-days and may-days before I married Mr. Bloomer and settled in the country to devote my time and advice to the improvement of his niece, poor Lucy. Alas, she has never taken a word of it, and I have now no hope,—which you will agree with me, Mr.—you will agree with me in thinking a great pity, Mr.—Mr.—I beg pardon, I did not quite catch your name?”

“Mr. Crow,” replied Crowley, with a courteous bow, and another tremour on the lips of Miss Longland.

“Ha! ha! I don’t believe that, but I daresay I shall find it on your luggage. Well, I was going to tell you I have taken the greatest pains to communicate my acquirements to Lucy, but all to no purpose, for I am sorry to say she is exclusively devoted to reading and drawing and outlandish languages, which you know are not calculated to make much noise in the world. You would hardly imagine that though she was quite out of her mind to come to London, nothing could persuade her to go to the great poultry show! No, nor a single party of any kind, though we have been living in the midst of fashion, in Diot Street, Bloomsbury, and knew everybody from Kentish Town to the Mansion House. She did nothing in the world but stay at home by herself, and walk about Bloomsbury Square, as if she had lost her wits. What could she have come to town for?”

"I should like to know," thought Crowley; and his eyes would have made the enquiry, but she was again in her book, and to all appearance determined to hear no more.

"There must," he again thought, "there really must have been some sort of intelligence between Bloomsbury Square and that fellow on the platform."

At last Mrs. Bloomer announced their approach to her station, and he was just as much at a loss as ever. Nothing remained but to give up the mystery, or solve it by ill-bred questions, which after all he doubted whether Mrs. Bloomer could answer. He was pretty sure the individual who haunted him was not known to *her*, and still more sure that if he were known to her niece she had reasons for keeping the fact to herself. He gave the matter up, and as common civility demanded a little conversation at parting, after so much in the course of the morning, he tried to make himself agreeable. The travellers in the luggage van being the most interesting topic, he earnestly hoped they had not suffered by the expedition, and would arrive at home as happy as they had been triumphant.

It is surprising what important information we sometimes obtain from the most unexpected sources. Jim Crow and the Aylesburys paid the full amount of their debts to him, and inspired their mistress with another gabble of gratitude, which cleared up all his doubts.

"My dear madam," he replied, "I only did what anybody else would have done."

"I beg your pardon, Mr.—Mr.—ah, I must go and look at your luggage ! There was another gentleman who saw my distress before you appeared—but I don't think he *was* a gentleman, for he only looked impertinent and did nothing at all."

Crowley turned his eye quickly upon the younger lady, and observed that she coloured and looked a little haughty, but whether in disapproval of the gentleman or the unfavourable allusion to him, he could not determine.

"I should have interfered much sooner," he observed, "but imagined that gentleman to be an acquaintance, and feared I might be intrusive."

"An acquaintance ! I should think not, indeed !" And a toss of the head made it impossible. But another look at Miss Longland made it quite the contrary. She rose from her seat and looked out for the station in most unequivocal confusion. He had no need to ask questions. They were fully answered. Her object in going to London was to meet that person, and the meeting was clandestine. And so ended his three hours' dream.

When she turned to put on her hat her colour had subsided, and her look was so ingenuous that he felt himself a monster to doubt her prudence. But the case was too plain. Would anybody trust to looks after this ! In spite of his mortification, however, he was most assiduous in assisting her to collect the numerous packages which usually encumber a journey from London, and obtained smiles enough in repayment to wish he had never seen them.

And now the whistle sounded—the pace was slackened to a stand-still—and the two or three porters of a small station bustled backwards and forwards, with a shout about some place, which for aught he could understand might be any other place. The carriage door was unlocked and swung open, the band-boxes were swung out, and out bounced the plumes and streamers to superintend the debarkation from the van.

“By your leave, ma’am; by your leave.”

“Oh! they’ve tossed my Aylesburys on their backs!”

“Tickets, ma’am. Tickets—tickets—tickets!”

“And there’s Jim Crow standing on his head!”

“This your luggage, ma’am? Where to, ma’am? Want a fly, ma’am?”

“Stop! stay! Leave me alone! I don’t want anything!” And away Mrs. Bloomer flashed her flounces, followed by a countryfied hobbledehoy, whose sole business seemed to be grinning at his mistress.

“I’m sorry to say farewell,” said Crowley to Miss Longland. “Travellers seldom meet again. Suffer me to see you to your carriage.”

Lucy thanked him with another flitting blush, and he helped her to alight; holding the little hand as long as he could, and conveying her packages to a carriage in the rear of the station. Having placed them as carefully as he could, he handed her in, and stood looking at her for a moment, as if doubting whether he might enquire to what happy place she was going, for Mrs. Bloomer had forgotten amongst

her many communications, to give him her address. But he seemed, after what he had witnessed, to think better of it, and nothing remained but to say his first and last farewell. Did she seem sorry to part? He rather fancied so, but this was absurd! Her thoughts were on the London platform, and he turned slowly away.

What a creature was casting all her treasures to the winds! Now that he had seen her on her feet, the grace of her figure and its action, appeared almost to exceed the beauty of her face. He should never see her like again!

Seated once more in his lonely train-carriage, he threw a last look at her. She was standing up and regarding the departure with a smile, which he would have conjured into melancholy. Idiot that he was to think so! He bowed another adieu, which was sweetly returned. The engine screamed, and she was out of sight.

CHAPTER III.

THE scene must now change to a wild romantic region, four or five miles from this station. Regarding it from the level ground above, a bold variety of meadow and corn-field and blooming heather, descended and diminished into an endless expanse of golden broom, with the scattered commencement of a vast forest, rolling its dappled hues into a distance of blue and broken hills. In the midst was the square tower of a little church, which told tales of old acquaintance with past generations, when its ancient yew trees furnished bows for the hands which were now a portion of the soil; and not far was a many-gabled parsonage, dodging intrusive eyes behind tottering elms that opened their hearts to a few vagrant sheep and donkeys, and their arms to a numerous settlement of rooks and jackdaws.

Retreating from these, a tumbling zig-zag of cottages staggered about as if they had suffered from the neighbourhood of a tempting invitation to "Man and beast," which occasionally confounded one with the other; though they were, here and

there, admonished by something more respectable, with a patch of lawn and a bed or two of holly-hocks. There was likewise another little building in the centre of a green, where some animated tatters were engaged in games of quoits and cricket, and various acrobatic evolutions. It was rather more defined in its architecture than anything about it, as if from some greater necessity to keep it in repair. It was round and low, and had a peaked roof of red tiles, with a door half wood and half iron bars. Could this be the place “where wicked people go to?” Could this be the retreat of rural indiscretion, where all gave token of untempted simplicity! *Oh, la vertu ! où va-t-elle se nicher !*

Half a mile farther was a very considerable mansion, surrounded by a large park, and no doubt the residence of the principal lord of the land. He appeared, however, to be more content with taking his rents than favouring the payers with his company; for the walls had a tinge of neglect, and the windows were shut, like his eyes to the parish wants.

Passing a dilapidated stone bridge over a small stream that bubbled in and out, and almost round about this extra mundane settlement, our Dr. Syntax in search of the picturesque would have found himself on the green before mentioned. If inclined for a stroll he might have been tempted by a narrow and darkly-shaded lane that led towards the forest; but we suspect he would not have travelled far, for a green ditch on either side very broadly

hinted that it led to nothing savoury. At the end of two or three hundred yards he would have been stopped by a rough gate, hanging upon one hinge and opening into a farm-yard, which was by no means a model one.

A pleasant place enough is a farm-yard, *sometimes*. That is, when there is plenty of clean straw, and a stock of drowsy cattle that can eat no more, and cribs well filled, and a sleeping partnership of plethoric porkers beneath them, slumbering in sweet forgetfulness of spareribs and sausages. This is all very pleasant, and so are snug sheltering barns and well swept cart sheds and comfortable stables, and a sleek team in them, never taxed to greater speed than two miles an hour. We have a happy remembrance of the time when we used to filch fishing lines from their long tails, and astound them with the bang of our rusty gun, purchased from the blacksmith with the savings of our pocket-money, and destined to be the death-knell of sparrows and yellow-hammers beyond calculation. Our game-bag has been better filled since those days, but our hearts have never known the same triumphs.

But the farm-yard in question was nothing of this description. The first step you took into it was a squish up to your knee, and the next was a squash up to heaven knows what. The pigs and the cattle had a gaunt and hungry look, as if they had a mind to eat one another; the cribs were broken, and only supplied with rubbish to prolong the pangs of starvation; the barns displayed their rafters through the thatch, and the stabling had

lost boards enough to let in all the coughs and cracked heels that career upon the north wind. Not a yellow-hammer was to be seen, and the few miserable cocks and hens found no reward for their scratching, but the consolation that they were not likely to scratch their way to market.

One side of this quivering quagmire was occupied by the owner's house, an irregular building of yellow plaster, picked out with mire and roofed with mossy tiles. It appeared to have been built, as far as it went, some years ago, but never finished. Spare materials of brick and lime were piled before it, and against it leaned slabs for window and door sills, and ladders and scaffolding, all worn out with watching for better days. Everything about the place proclaimed its proprietor to be either very poor or very penurious, and afforded equal evidence that he had grudged himself a helpmate, for it was quite out of the question that any two heads could have agreed in thinking it habitable.

We have been rather minute in our account of this abode, because the occupant was one of the principal magnates of Broome Warren, the name of the village we have been describing. In the afternoon of the day of Mrs. Bloomer's journey from London he came forth for description himself. He was rather a short and stout built gentleman, with a bull neck and dark square face, remarkable for the heavy determined jaw and projecting forehead; a pair of very small and deeply-imbedded eyes were black as ebony, and squeezed into narrow slits with puckers in the corners, like those of some savage

animal. The mouth had the same character. It seemed to have been wider and to have been stitched up, which gave it a cruel smile, as if the said animal were not to be trusted. The head, as he pulled off a broad-brimmed felt hat, something like a cracknel biscuit, to wipe it with a red cotton handkerchief, was a little bald, but garnished with short black wiry curls which betrayed no touch of time, his age being little upwards of forty-five; a stoop in his walk suggested more, but it was only the stoop of one who is borne down by meditation and not disposed to partnership. His costume was a moleskin shooting jacket, with waistcoat and trowsers to match; the latter very low in the bracing and hanging about his heels in rucks, which made his body much too long for his legs; altogether, his natural gifts, with his own improvements, were not very attractive.

Such, however, were the exterior traits of Mr. Christopher Cheek, agent for the Broome Warren estate, and owner of two or three extensive farms of his own. These he had purchased from time to time with the profits of his employment; and, according to common report, for a small fraction of their value, by taking timely advantage of agricultural distresses, which at that time were of too frequent occurrence. But there was another view of these purchases, said to be adopted and directed by Mr. Cheek himself, which showed him in a light much more amiable, the shadows being thrown upon the luckless vendors, who were charged with improvident habits, bad farming and so forth, which must have sent them to

prison if he had not come forward to assist them. Conflicting rumours were never brought to a compromise, and Mr. Cheek shared the reputation of many other important people, of whom the world decides there is no making head or tail.

He had picked his way round the edges of his farm-yard and scraped his boots upon the gate, from whence he lifted them slowly and heavily along the road to the green—heavily because the rucks of his trowsers incumbered his heels, and slowly because he might have been afraid of dropping his cogitations in a lane that never kept itself clean.

And so he arrived on the green and approached the bridge, from which a pack of idle boys were pelting the gudgeons. As soon as they saw him, they commenced running away, tugging off their caps as they turned their backs, and evincing a fearful consciousness that they had been doing something wrong, though they hardly knew what. Mr. Cheek, be it known, was a great reprobate of idleness, and his terrors were much augmented by the awful fact of his being a Justice of the Peace; a dignity for which he had been thought the fittest person possible, where there happened to be no one else.

“Where'er he gazed a gloom pervaded space,” and the alarm of the little boys was no more than the general feeling of the parish, who were never so remarkable for activity as when they were making room for his worship.

“Hillo! you Jack Rokins and the rest of you,” he shouted, “come here with you.”

. The boys slunk back, cowering and cap in hand.

“ You, Tom Dabchick, why ain’t you minding Mrs. Bloomer’s ducks ?”

“ Please, sir, they’re gone to Lunnon.”

“ And you, Jerry Hodges, why ain’t you routing up the nettles in my orchard ? Don’t I give you sixpence a week for it ?”

“ Please, sir, you ain’t never paid me, and father says I shan’t work for nothin’.”

“ Father said so, did he ? I s’pose he had been to the ale-house, for he never goes anywhere else. Tell him if I catch him prowling about my hedges I’ll clap him in the cage — d’ye hear ? and you, Jack Rokins, why don’t your sister Sukey come for the skim milk as she used to do ?”

“ Tain’t my fault, your worship ; she says she ain’t a coming any more.”

“ Not coming any more ? and why not ?”

“ Please your worship,” continued Jack with a grin, “ she says you said summut as she did not like, and——”

“ And what else ?”

“ She says, sir, if ever you speaks to her again she knows some one as ’ll teach your worship better manners.”

Mr. Cheek flourished his black-thorn ; but the enemy were too light for him, and scampered away with a clatter of tongues that gave small hope of amendment. The last words he could distinguish were from the lips of Jerry Hodges, whose father he had threatened with the round-house.

“ Send Dad to the cage, will he !” said Jerry,

colouring up with fury. "I should like to catch un ! M'hap I may live to see un there hisself some day ! And what's more, I've half a mind to shy a stone at his head." But he thought better of it and vanished with the rest of them, throwing somersaults and shouting at the rooks overhead, and Mr. Cheek continued his walk. We have only interrupted it for a passing glance at his popularity and authority, and his mode of maintaining them ; which, as we believe it to be the usual one, is, no doubt, the best.

The path improved in proportion as Mr. Cheek got farther from home, and he soon found himself ruminating along a very pretty one. The hill side on his left came down with waves of yellow blossom, and at some distance to his right descended to the bright little stream, which divided it from banks of purple heather and wild clumps of Scots fir and tortuous oak. But he had no feeling for the beauties of nature ; he had other things to think about. Presently he came to a picturesque lodge where he was admitted at a pair of handsome gates, by an old woman, to a winding drive through a thick and variegated shrubbery. A charming villa soon presented itself, with lawns and terraces of choice flowers, and fronted with a highly-wrought conservatory of treasures from lands which at that time had been but little ransacked.

What could have been the business of a man from a sty like Mr. Cheek's, in a spot so delicate as this ? The same question was asked of the old woman of the lodge when her helpmate tottered out to look at him.

"I can't think what it can be," replied the old man to himself. "He comes here pretty often, and Mrs. Toogood seems to think better of him than anybody else; but somehow or other, I never see Mr. Cheek without being reminded of the Book of Genesis and the devil getting into Paradise!"

An old butler and footman, who answered the door-bell when Mr. Cheek gave it a more modest pull than was his custom at the doors of more humble acquaintance, seemed in no great hurry to satisfy his question of whether Mrs. Toogood was at home. The fact, however, was not to be denied, and without acknowledging a few patronizing hopes of their well-being otherwise than by a bow of grave civility, the former of these long standing retainers opened the drawing-room door and showed in the visitor.

Mrs. Toogood was not present but would be looked for in the garden, and so whilst Mr. Cheek is staring at the elegance around him, we may give the few moments to some account of his agency and for whom he held it.

The proprietor was Sir Harry Longland, who many years ago enjoyed enough of Fortune's favours to desire no more. He had succeeded to an old baronetcy and a large fortune, had every advantage of person and requirement, and all the popularity which usually attends such claims, with the additional blessings of a beautiful and accomplished young wife, who had no thought but her devotion to him, and a bright little promise of the uncommon treasure which we have attempted to describe in our journey hither. This ought to have been a

happy home ; and so, for a few years, it was. It was courted by the country, famed for its delights, and replete with every attraction which admiring friends could desire or imagine. There was but one misfortune to apprehend, and that was from the too careless confidence in others, which is apt to beset unwonted good nature and unlimited resources. The few years were quite sufficient to make that misfortune a woeful example—bills, of which the thoughtless victim knew nothing, except that they bore his name on the back for the accommodation of a particular friend on the turf, who was to fill in the amount according to necessity, were produced against him by money lenders of whom he had never heard, and appalled him with a too late conviction that improvidence could be carried into crime. Lady Longland never recovered the shock of her husband's ruin—grief drove her into decline ; and, though she lingered awhile amongst their troubles, he had the misery of laying her in an early tomb, just when their young daughter had arrived at an age to appreciate her loss, and he himself was compelled to fly the country. No one, but Mr. Cheek, as his agent, knew what had become of him, and he, for years, had preserved a dead silence, to which he professed to be bound by solemn obligation. All that we can add to this imperfect account is, that Sir Harry's hapless wife was the sister of Mr. Bloomer, to whom he had given the living of Broome Warren on his marriage, and afterwards confided the guardianship of his forlorn child.

CHAPTER IV.

WE must now attend to Mrs. Toogood, who entered with courteous condescension, and was met with such elaborate and bland respect that Jack Rokins and his friends would have gaped their eyes out.

Mrs. Toogood was about sixty years old. She had a round and not very lofty figure, but her manner was dignified, and though marked with some ceremony was not wanting in affability. She wore a grey silk dress and a widow's half-mourning cap, and the spare silvery locks that strayed about her temples betokened a rather unusual pride in the absence of everything artificial. Her prevailing expression was one of demure superiority and strict decorum, which in the mouth was carried rather to excess. An artist might have thought it a trifle out of drawing, for it was not quite parallel with her eyes, and its diagonal line and habit of compression bespoke a feeling of pertinacity—perhaps infallibility.

Having condescendingly begged Mr. Cheek to be seated, she began the conversation with a flattering

assurance that she was always gratified to see him, and hoped he brought her improved intelligence of the Parish.

"Why, ma'am," replied the gentleman, with a regretful shake of the head and a smile of commiseration; "you are aware it is rather a wilful one, but I am happy to say the charities with which you have so liberally entrusted me have made some improvement, and are likely to make more as they proceed."

"Not a word about charities, I beg of you, Mr. Cheek, for it is a maxim with me to forget all about them. Our right hand should never know what is done by our left." And Mrs. Toogood elevated her head and depressed the corners of the diagonal, as if conscious that she had delivered a sentiment unanswerable.

Mr. Cheek did not answer it, except by a bow of concession, and the assurance that he had never taken the liberty of saying a word about her in the dispensation of her bounty, and never would.

"I know you will not, Mr. Cheek, for I have always had the highest opinion of you. I formed it from the world's contrariety; for, as my own endeavours to amend my neighbours have met with nothing but ingratitude, it is a logical conclusion that you have deserved too well to be understood."

The diagonal was again compressed, defying mortal ingenuity to find a leak in the logic that could sail against wind and tide. Mr. Cheek acknowledged its soundness with another bow, and proceeded to say that, knowing Mrs. Toogood's objection to be

told who were the recipients of her generosity, he had studiously refrained from making any list of their names, or memorandum of the extent to which they had been benefited. Mrs. Toogood was thankful for his consideration, though the villagers, with Messrs. Hodges and Co., might have had no objection to see their bank book duly balanced.

The conversation then turned to the subject for which it had been desired, and showed the good lady's heart to such advantage that we sincerely regretted the chinks in another place.

" You are aware, Mr. Cheek," she said, " of my great affection for Miss Longland, who has ever since the death of her mother and the ruin of her long absent father, been my only consolation for having no family of my own. I am now advanced in life, and it is time to think of her future position ; for her uncle, our poor vicar, has, I fear, allowed his affairs to share the disorder of the parish."

" Ah, ma'am, I have often thought of it ! The young lady's case is most distressing ; and as I have made what little I possess by this agency for Sir Harry, I have studied day and night how to prove my grateful remembrance of it. Most willingly would I devote everything to her service and begin the world afresh ! But then, you see, comes the recollection that if I did so it would no longer be possible to maintain my situation, and the property must become a wilderness—all the proceeds being paid to the creditors, and nothing for years having remained for the agent, of course no other could be found. It grieves me very deeply !"

Mr. Cheek heaved a sigh, and Mrs. Toogood was

more than ever confirmed in her good opinion of him. She could not sufficiently admire his principles, and earnestly begged they might give him no further uneasiness. He might fully rely upon her giving Miss Longland all necessary advice if she only knew what to advise about, but to determine this she must be guided by some more precise information as to the prospects of Sir Harry, and what had become of him. "It is, I think, fifteen years since he left this country, and I have heard from Miss Longland that it is fully twelve since she received so much as a letter from him, or any tidings of his existence, excepting through yourself."

"It is very true, ma'am, and seems very unnatural, though in reality it is not so. Sir Harry is compelled to be very cautious, for many of his creditors have sold their claims to foreigners, who are looking out for him in all countries, and, if they find him, he has nothing to expect but a life of imprisonment. Not having seen Miss Longland since her childhood, he is unable to judge of her prudence, and fearful of confiding his assumed name and the place of his retreat. I never omit an opportunity of removing these fears and representing the strength of character imparted by your admirable advice; but he has suffered deeply and is hard to be convinced. He writes the most affectionate messages to Miss Longland in reply to the remittances which, by an arrangement with the principal creditors, I am permitted to send him, and I never fail to deliver them the moment they come."

"Miss Longland has mentioned your attention in that respect, but I am sorry to say it is not enough

to satisfy a heart so devoted as hers. She remembers her father with the most intense love; and, notwithstanding her great struggles to bear up, is most unhappy."

"Poor young lady!" sighed the worthy agent.

"The greatest service you could render would be to inform her more fully about Sir Harry's present name and address, and all those other particulars of which she lives in such miserable ignorance."

"Alas, ma'am, I am equally miserable to withhold them! But what can I do, bound hand and foot by a solemn engagement? Sir Harry, who was always a man of strong impulse, would visit the forfeiture of my word with immediate dismissal from the agency, and Miss Longland would lose the only channel of what information she receives!"

Mrs. Toogood was obliged to admit the reasoning, though the common reflection with which she yielded to it, caused him to look up with rather a quick glance of enquiry, as if he doubted whether it was meant for comfort or reproach. Of course, it was a mere fancy, for it only signified that the fate of that helpless orphan, as she might not unreasonably be called, must be a dreadful contemplation to those who reduced her to it; and most happy were those who had no part in it! The man of confidence declined his eyes and conceded again, as he always did; and Mrs. Toogood went on to lament that poor Lucy had not been confided to better protection than that of an almost imbecile uncle, from whom she understood there were no hopes whatever.

"None, I fear, ma'am ! None ! Ah, Mr. Bloomer ! He was a very worthy man ; and it is most extraordinary that, after a life of so much respectability, he should have taken to habits so unbecoming and so grievous to us all ! His addiction to ardent spirits has been the ruin of him."

"I am not ignorant, Mr. Cheek, of your great endeavours to reform him, and how much you encourage his visits to your house to keep him out of harm's way. But it seems to no purpose, for he grows weaker both in mind and body, and I have great fears that we may soon lose him. It is to meet such an emergency that I have requested this visit from you. Having some years ago laid by a few thousand pounds to accumulate for my young friend in the three per cent. consols, I have thought it time to make a codicil to my will, and am desirous of obtaining your signature as one of my witnesses."

It was a rule in Mr. Cheek's line of business to keep a sharp look out upon all mention of money ; but he suddenly recollect ed that he was not in his office ; and the business in hand was to look melancholy, that Mrs. Toogood, excellent as she was, must die like other people. So he merely shook his head and said, alas !

The bell was rung for the butler to be the second witness, and the sheet of foolscap was produced, and duly executed, and the business seemed done : but our far-sighted man of business continued musing and rather in a fidget, as if it were not done quite so completely as he thought advisable. Mrs. Toogood imagined she understood him, and hastened to ob-

serve, that though this was a bequest it would always be in her power to turn it into a present on Lucy's marriage, if she ever made up her mind to such an event.

“ Undoubtedly, ma'am ; and I earnestly pray she may receive it in that case instead of the first you contemplated. But there is one thing of which it strikes me very forcibly you must not lose sight. Miss Longland, with the amazing stores of good sense you have instilled into her, is in very singular circumstances. Her uncle's habits and the peculiarities of Mrs. Bloomer have deprived her of all acquaintance in her own rank of life, and she is known to nobody but the very small gentry hereabouts. If your generosity were made known she would immediately become an object of speculation to persons totally unworthy of her, and some very unhappy marriage might be the consequence ; or, supposing that not to be the case, there is no doubt that, so surrounded, all better chances would be kept aloof and she might never marry at all. I would, therefore, strongly advise you—that is, I would not presume to offer advice to a lady so much more capable of giving it—but strongly submit it to your consideration whether this provision should not remain a profound secret, even from the young lady herself, until some proper occasion for its announcement. The right time, I would take the liberty of suggesting, will be when the right person comes forward, for I feel it would be very dangerous before.”

“ Mr. Cheek, you are aware that my right hand knows nothing of my left ! Such friendly foresight will be quite sure to bring its own reward !”

Mr. Cheek humbly hoped it would.

She then placed, as was generally her custom, a five pound note for the most necessitous folks of the parish in one of his hands, which followed her own precept of never saying a word about it to the other, or to any body else, and Mr. Cheek bowed devoutly and dragged his heels homeward ; consulting the ground all the way on the subject of his next step.

On his arrival he found his day labourers assembled for the usual payment of Saturday afternoon—a bad habit they had contracted time out of mind—and, as there was no talking them into reason, he dispatched the one least likely to abscond to get change for five pounds, out of which he paid them punctually up to some day last month. They all seemed taken by surprise, and with more content than usual, and many thanks, set off in a happy party to the public-house.

It will, we dare say, be imagined that these five pounds composed the identical note which had been received from Mrs. Toogood ; but what then ? It had been given for the most necessitous folks in the parish, and it was conscientiously conveyed to them. If it did not happen to occur to Mr. Cheek that the weekly wages might have been more correctly liquidated from some other fund, we must recollect that he had a great deal to think about, and more excuses than most people for slight lapses of memory. We must likewise admit that it may be better to withhold charity altogether than dispense it amongst the vagabonds who, according to much excellent authority, are the only people that ever apply for it.

Benevolence, like Mrs. Toogood's, is apt to resemble some great fountain-head, which inundates and overwhelms the soil where benefit can only be derived from skilful irrigation ; and, where it is unable to work channels to the best advantage, it is surely desirable for expert engineering to lend assistance. We make these remarks because we have no doubt Mr. Cheek would have made them himself; and because, with his conspicuous place in our history, it is premature to judge him on his first appearance.

We trust a jury of our readers, supposing us to be blessed with a dozen, will agree with us, and accept a better plea than usual for "extenuating circumstances."

CHAPTER V.

IT is not surprising that though Mrs. Toogood's disposition was kind and generous, and her head not devoid of good sense when she would give it fair play, her inveterate self-complacency obscured one half of these claims on society, and made impatient people almost grudge her the other. Formal visits and formal returns, once or twice a twelvemonth, were nearly all the events of her life; for ever since she had been a widow—so long ago that the middle-aged generation had never seen her husband—she had thought fit to decline all parties, and regret her want of spirits to give any. And thus had her life been passing uncheered and eventless, excepting only the daily visit of her young friend, Lucy Longland.

This exception, considering the difference of age, and the still greater difference of character, would hardly have existed but for the dreary isolation of both parties, who were thus blown together like loose leaves, which blight too often mingles—the green with the sere. Lucy was always looked for and always brought comfort. She knew all the

wants to be relieved in the village ; read all that was worth, or not worth, hearing, in the “County Chronicle ;” arranged the flowers, touched sweetly on the old piano, which was never touched by anybody else, and submitted to a great deal of advice of which she stood in no need. Mrs. Toogood was therefore impatient for her return from London, whither she had been absent a whole week, and no doubt exposed to such company as would make it necessary to begin all the admonitions over again. What a responsible duty, and how fortunate that here was still one friend qualified to fulfil it.

The fervour of Mrs. Toogood’s gratitude for this benign provision of nature was interrupted by the sound of wheels and the alarm of the door-bell. If she had looked for any other visitors than Lucy and her aunt, the doubt was removed by the crowing of a cock, and a shrill blast of command to keep the Aylesburys right side uppermost. In another moment Mrs. Bloomer streamed in to display the new fashions, and perform a self-imposed promise of calling on her way home, never dreaming how much more readily she would have been absolved from it than the unconsidered companion behind her.

Having already reported enough of Mrs. Bloomer’s London triumphs, we will not indulge in a repetition, though the placid attention with which she was listened to really deserved to be chronicled. It is not often that the virtue of patience is met with amongst those who tax it so severely in others ; and if, in Mrs. Toogood’s case, it sometimes resembled the patience of a poacher in watch for a

treacherous shot, she knew of old that the bird was impenetrable, and prudently reserved her ammunition. When, however, she had lent her ear long enough to doubt the chance of its restoration, she began to think it might be laid out to better interest on Lucy.

"And you, my dear," she enquired with prim kindness, "have you nothing to tell me of the benefits you have derived from such distinguished circles?"

Lucy was obliged to acknowledge that she had not received very many. She had thought it best to excuse herself and devote the opportunity to lessons in many things in which she was deficient.

"Lessons! I believe so!" broke in the effervescent vicaress. "Nothing but the school-room from morning to night! It was quite useless to show her what a waste of time it was to learn things which none but outlandish people could understand. All my advice was thrown away."

"Indeed!" said one side of the prim mouth, and "so much the better!" said the other. "Your eagerness for instruction, my dear, is quite a reproach to us all. Is it possible that you went all the way to London for nothing else?"

Lucy took the question as a mere ejaculation, and replied with admiring remarks upon a vase of beautiful roses and carnations, which stood on the table by which she was sitting, and were brilliant enough to reflect their hues upon her cheeks.

"I have been a sad truant to your flowers, my

dear Mrs. Toogood, but I will make amends, for I have missed them very much."

"And yet, would you believe it," said the irrepressible, "Bloomsbury Square was more blooming than ever, and she walked there every day. Nothing in London is worth talking about, though everything is so much better."

At all events there was nothing that Lucy meant to talk about but the roses, which were not well-arranged, and occupied all her attention.

"But ask her, Mrs. Toogood, only ask her what she thought of our journey home. She has plenty to say about that! Plenty!"

"Yes, truly," she replied, with apparent misapprehension, "I was very uneasy, and am so still, to know how my poor uncle has passed the time."

"Oh, me! I had so much news I quite forgot him! You don't happen to know how he does?"

"Very much better, I am happy to say," was Mrs. Toogood's slightly acidulated answer.

"I'm so glad. I was quite sure how it would be! I always take too much care of him. But only ask Lucy if she has not something else to tell you—ask her that!"

Perhaps Lucy's sweet lips might likewise have curled with a little acidulation had it not been impossible, for her love for her uncle was only second to that with which she remembered her parents.

"I believe," she said, "my aunt must allude to a pleasant companion who occupied a seat in the same carriage."

"Pleasant! I should think so! And wasn't he handsome? I should like to know that! Such a conversation about books and histories, and I don't know what all! And, oh me! if we had gone a few stages further, I believe I should never have got her home again. Half his name was Jim Crow, but what the other half was, goodness knows!"

"Jim Crow!" repeated Mrs. Toogood, a little more attentively,—"Jim Crow? And could you learn no more of him?"

"He would not tell," said Lucy, with a delicate tinge over her temples, "though aunt told him all about ourselves, and almost asked him."

Farther personal description appeared more and more to confirm some latent suspicion in Mrs. Toogood, and presently her countenance was beaming with satisfaction.

"And you thought him pleasant, did you, Lucy?"

"Oh yes, he was pleasant;" and the tinge upon the dimples said "very."

"And did you agree with your aunt in thinking him so handsome?"

Lucy laughed, and did not know; but the treacherous tinge seemed to know better. She believed he was good-looking.

"And gentlemanly?"

The pertinacious questioning was enough to make any young lady laugh and blush, but there was no denying that he was very gentlemanly.

"And accomplished?"

Lucy could not pretend to be a judge, but she thought so.

“Well, I think he will be flattered when I tell him all this !”

“Oh, goodness gracious ! You know him then ?”

Mrs. Toogood made it a maxim never to be hasty in forming conclusions : we were all fallible ; many persons were called Jim, and many names began with Crow ; but if the two abbreviations should happen to expand into James Crowley, she was happy to say he was her very favourite nephew.

“You don’t say so ! You can’t mean it ! How strange ! How wonderful ! How incomprehensible, that your nephew should turn out to be my game-cock’s godfather, and that my game-cock’s godfather should turn out to be your nephew ! Could any one have imagined such a coincidence ?”

“You forget,” interrupted Lucy, who now saw the motive of all the questions she had answered so unwarily, and began to tremble for their betrayal ; “you forget that Mrs. Toogood is by no means certain.”

“Very true, my dear ; it is wrong to be certain ; for those who are never certain can never be disappointed. All that I go by is a telegram I received this morning to acquaint me that my nephew had a little business in this part of the country, and would sleep here to-night.”

And he was punctual to his word. Mrs. Bloomer’s preceding raptures had drowned another ring at the bell, and just at that moment the butler again opened the door to announce Mr. James Crowley.

Mrs. Bloomer was in great commotion, and Lucy could not help some small degree of confusion whilst Mrs. Toogood advanced to meet him with unwonted

vivacity, and re-introduce him with becoming form—a ceremony for which he had been prepared by the equipage at the door, though he had by no means got over his bewilderment as to what such a whim of fortune might portend.

Having bowed to a hurricane on one side and a graceful recognition on the other, and duly congratulated himself on the unexpected pleasure of the meeting, he seated himself by his aunt to make the usual dutiful inquiries, appearing really to feel some interest in the matter.

As Lucy foresaw, the earliest opportunity was taken for disconcerting her.

“Do you know, James, we were actually talking about you at the moment you came in, and it is fortunate you did not hear us? Such compliments are apt to make young gentlemen rather vain, and it would be wrong to tell you anything about them. It is all very well to be pleasant and accomplished and gentlemanly and good-looking, but people should never think themselves so—should they, Lucy?”

Whether James was in danger of becoming conscious of such qualities, we will not inquire, but he had the good taste to laugh at them, and bow his acknowledgments only to Mrs. Bloomer, as if he knew it to be quite out of the question that any younger lady could recollect him for a moment. It earned him some gratitude and wounded no delicacy; but there was a visible retirement of manner where he could least afford it. He made many ingenious changes in the conversation, but the damage was never quite repaired.

"And so," continued the complacent aunt, "you have at last found your way to Broome Warren; quite satisfied, I suppose, with paying me the compliment of a visit when I chance to be in London. But I never disturb the enjoyment of the present by recalling the mortifications of the past; for it is our duty, as I have often told you, to prefer happiness to pain, which I think no reasonable person would contradict."

"I am quite of your opinion, aunt; its wisdom is undeniable, and I always do my best to follow it. In proof of which, my present business in the country is to find a pleasant home hereabouts and become a rural squire under your excellent auspices."

Mrs. Bloomer proclaimed her delight, both for self and niece; but Aunt Toogood was more concerned to account for such a change.

"Now, James, you cannot deceive me! I am sure you must be ill, and have been recommended change of air. Ah, you may laugh, and it is quite right to keep up your spirits and look so well; but we all know that, in pulmonary affections, the looks are no criterion."

"Oh, goodness gracious me!" burst in the vicaress. "There's nothing like ass's milk for consumption, and I have a female donkey that will be just the thing!"

Lucy's demure fit was not proof against this suggestion, and she joined the invalid in a little peal of amusement.

"No, indeed," he protested; "you need be under no apprehensions. I have no doctor but myself, and

have prescribed the country only because I am tired of town. I have brought my cab down in order that I may drive about in search of a hunting-box. By-the-bye, being so far astray, I went to the wrong station, which deprived me of the satisfaction of giving a lift to my godson."

Vain subterfuge! Gifted minds are not so easily deceived.

"No, my dear nephew, no! If it is not incipient consumption that drives you here, it is something else which is very apt to produce it. I admire your fortitude, for there is no doubt whatever that you have met with some disappointment. Ah, Mrs. Bloomer, it is long since *you* can have had one, and Lucy will probably never have any to forget; but I can assure you it is no subject for ridicule."

There was a feeling in the reproof which showed Mrs. Toogood to have had cruel experience; and her dutiful nephew, who had sometimes an exceptionable habit of humouring her wisdom for his own amusement, was tempted to recur to it to enliven the reluctant mirth behind the carnations. The justness of his aunt's penetration was acknowledged with becoming melancholy; and a catalogue of wounds from certain crack shots, which would have made a cock-pheasant in a battue comparatively scathless. He had found every heart at Almack's engaged half-a-dozen deep, and his peace of mind was worn out in waiting for a vacancy. The forest should be his hospital, the nightingales his consolation, and the beeches they sang upon would serve as tablets for half the names in the "Court Guide." Mrs. Toogood

shook her head with a sigh, and merely observed that it was not the first time that victims had been known to excite hilarity at their own expense.

But Mrs. Bloomer's bottled spirits, which had been fizzing ever since the mention of a hunting-box, burst out with an explosion :

“ My dear Mr. Crowley ! My dear sir ! A hunting-box did you say ? I provided for your want the moment you named it ! The place of all places ! Beautiful, Elizabethan, wild, lonely, and large enough to hold all ‘ the sorrows of Werther,’ and haunted enough, I dare say, to frighten all the sufferings out of Guy’s or Bartholomew’s. Ha, ha ! But you know I am only joking ; for I cannot say you look as if your sufferings were very great ; and, seriously speaking, there’s hunting and shooting enough to have comforted Job himself. I am only sorry it is two or three miles from us ; but we’ll come and see you every day, and send all our friends,—so different from those you are tired of ! Such a delightful change ! Never mind Lucy’s objections ; for I see she is going to dissuade you. It is only because she has an interest in letting it, and thinks it unbecoming to take such quick advantage of our introduction. The advantage is all on your side, and, of course, I am the best judge.”

Lucy was indeed very much discomposed, and protested that Oakendell was nothing more than a ruin, and had not been inhabited for the last twenty years.

“ The very thing to recommend it,” Crowley insisted. “ I have a fellow-feeling for ruins, owls, and

bats, and if there is only a ghost, my establishment will be complete ; for I came here to be a hermit, and shall take my wallet and staff and make a pilgrimage to Oakendell this afternoon."

Lucy attempted to smile, but she was still mortified, and remarked that her uncle must have been waiting dinner for the last hour. The hint succeeded in reminding Mrs. Bloomer of an individual who might have been supposed to have some claim to consideration, and she started up with many apologies for tearing herself away.

" Good-by, Mrs. Toogood ; good-by, Mr. Crowley. You must excuse me. I'll stay longer the next time ; indeed I will ; and I'll send and prepare Mrs. Rokins, who has charge of the house, and will do your washing for you ; and tell her to be sure and have her pretty daughter Sukey in the way, in case you should want a housemaid ; and you'll be such a happy hermit, you won't know what to do with yourself."

And out she rushed, with a flutter and a fuss that again called to mind the tail of a sky-rocket. Lucy passed him with the semi-formality of a smile and a bow, but too much embarrassed with the absurdities of their brace of aunts to add a word of adieu.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Crowley was seated alone with Mrs. Too-good, her first inquiry was what he thought of Lucy Longland. Of course there was but one opinion to be given, but he had been sufficiently warned by the ill-judged repetition of Lucy's opinion of himself to give it less emphatically than he felt it. He could not, however, refrain from asking further information about her, and returned to the subject of Oakendell, inquiring what particular interest she possessed in it. This obtained him all that he wanted, as the explanation involved her whole history, as far as we have given it. The conclusion was an answer to his question. The creditors of Sir Harry Longland, though they had laid hands on the main proceeds of his estate, had by some means been prevented from including those of Oakendell, which were reserved for the maintenance of his daughter. Unfortunately, the highly respectable agent had never been able to sell it or find a tenant, and poor Lucy had lived, from the time of her father's departure from England, entirely dependent upon her uncle—a state which she every year felt more bit-

terly, and the end of which presented no prospect whatever.

“None whatever!” repeated Crowley, who had listened with much more attention than he usually paid to his esteemed aunt. “Has Mr. Bloomer nothing but his living?”

“He has, I believe, a few hundreds a-year during his life, but nothing to leave; for the lady he married, of whom you have just seen as much as you desire, was the daughter of a small attorney, sufficiently sharp-sighted to perceive that Mr. Bloomer knew nothing of business and might easily be imposed upon. The marriage-settlement was said to have been drawn up without examination or inquiry, and everything the poor man had at his disposal secured to his widow.”

“But the widow—when she becomes one?”

“Will, I fear, do nothing. She has by no means the affection for Lucy which she would have us believe. Old as she is, she is jealous of that great beauty, and equally so of that superior understanding, which, however unobtrusive, tends to keep her in a state of petty discomfort, if not of subjection. She sees that, in the estimation of the few people they know, she occupies a second place, which is an additional reason for limiting the few to a few less, and chafes at the necessity of confining her discontent to taunts against all acquirements which she has not education to understand, and all the more becoming feelings which she has not heart to emulate. When ever Mr. Bloomer dies, this forced restraint will cease, and there is little doubt that her first exercise of

freedom will be to disembarass herself of the hapless girl whom her vanity has conjured into a rival."

Crowley was surprised to see how his aunt's momentary forgetfulness of her mission to instruct the world could emancipate such tolerably good sense. Perhaps many besides Mrs. Toogood could pass through their lives with improved grace, if they could only dismount from some stumbling hobbyhorse.

"And what," he asked, suppressing a few strong remarks upon Sir Harry and the vicar, "what could induce her uncle to take a step so lamentable?"

"He had become acquainted," she replied, "with his wife's father upon some occasion of law connected with his living, and had been presented as a good catch to the waning fascinations that graced the upper stories of the office. Having never been famous for powers of resistance, a combined attack from four or five sources at once had, in the course of a few visits, fluttered the weak garrison of his head into a capitulation. He had made himself so agreeable that some atonement was indispensable; and a merciful arrangement provided that the pillage should be restricted to one assailant only—that one being selected at the intercession of several potent fits of hysterics. And so it was that Miss Angelica Liptrot had marched into Broome Warren at the head of her sky-rocket tail, and planted her standard in its once peaceful vicarage."

Crowley restrained himself to an expression of wonder that, with so many admirable gifts, Miss

Longland had not been provided for by some suitable marriage.

“Ah, my dear James, that is what I have often thought about; but very few persons would be suited to Lucy, and the better families about the country have never seen her.”

“But surely she has some acquaintance in London?” he asked, in a manner which any one else would have thought pointed.

“I am sorry to say none. Both her father and mother were the last of their families, except Mr. Bloomer; and when misfortune fell upon them, their acquaintance fell off, which is too often the case when there is nobody to instruct such people that these are the times when they ought to cling closer. The only gentleman she knows is a very good young man who resides near the village and has long entertained a devoted affection for her.”

“A young man!” echoed Crowley, with a little more quickness and a little more point than before; “and who the —— is the devoted young man? Who is he?”

“A Mr. Philpot. As I say, he is very good, and I have no doubt you will like him exceedingly; for he is a great sportsman and will make you an excellent companion; but he is not much as to family or education, and I believe his means are little better. Lucy has claims to a husband of far greater pretensions, though, under the peculiar circumstances, I have never quite decided upon offering my advice; partly from the difficulty of judging what is best for her, and partly because she has never asked it. The

necessity of relying upon her own guidance at home has induced a habit of withholding her confidence everywhere else ; and no one who is capable of appreciating her great good sense, would venture to intrude upon it. Besides, notwithstanding her sweet temper, she is very high-minded, and has a tact, most remarkable in so young a person, for making everything relating to herself unapproachable. For several years she has not even mentioned her father, though the deep gloom that comes over her, whenever she believes herself to be unobserved, shows too well how her thoughts are engaged."

"Yes, yes ; I can understand all that, and sympathize with her cause for sorrow, and admire her pride and her prudence ; but about this very good Mr. Philpot and his devotion. Of course, such an amiable young lady is not insensible to it ?"

"I suspect not, James. Indeed, I more than suspect ; because it is not right to suspect before you are certain. When young persons reside in the same village and are in daily communication—more especially when they happen to be only two—you know there is invariably a reciprocity."

Our sensitive friend asked no more questions, and looked somewhat blank and bitter, as one who thought the world a bad bargain and not worth a rush. Perhaps he did not fancy his aunt was quite so sensible as she had seemed five minutes before ; perhaps triple reciprocities were not in his way, and the fastidious spirit which could not condescend to be the rival of coronets, might not have been very eager to contest a prize against corduroys and high-

lows. Perhaps the man of the platform paid him another visit—perhaps Lucy was descending from the skies into a common country flirt, who could not travel a hundred miles without a scamp at one end and a lout at the other. Whatever his cogitations might have been, he carried them off to prepare for dinner, at which Mrs. Toogood expected him to do credit to the change of air by an excellent appetite.

But the expectation, as far as it was founded on a dainty repast that would have tempted most people who had travelled so far upon a cup of coffee, was not fulfilled. He preferred dining on his disappointment, now much more substantial than his former ones, and seemed to enjoy that sort of cheer immensely. It is probable that anybody but the respected lady, so charmed with his high spirits, might have thought him a trifle artificial; for, in conformity with occasional propensities of art, they left nature a long way behind them; but she was rather disposed to flatter herself that their excitement arose from the pleasure of her own society. It was, therefore, no wonder that she exerted herself to keep them alive by reminding him how much his engagement of Oakendell House would assist the prospects of Lucy and Mr. Philpot.

Dinner was soon over; for the fine trout of the first course was untouched, though strongly recommended as the catching of that good young man; and the beautiful leveret of the second was equally unfortunate, though shot by the same hand. It was a marvel what James could live upon; for there was clearly some clause in the code of fashion against the

countrified habits of the table ; and Mrs. Toogood only wished she knew the substitute, because it would be such a benefit to the poor.

When left to himself, he drew his chair to the window, more to enjoy his inward contemplations than the harmonious scene without, and looking as if he rather agreed with Solon, that no man could be accounted happy till he was dead. Of a certainty, the history of his past life, since nine o'clock that morning, had not been very encouraging. Could any one have dreamt that those translucent eyes, in which he had seemed to catch the first glimpse of a heart untrammeled, would prove as great a delusion as the blacks and blues of Belgravia ? That, like them, they had brightened by the application of soft nonsense, and, like nothing else, deepened by penetrating the mysteries of bad grammar and provincial *patois* ? But for this wonder of the wilderness, he might have found its natives very good sort of people. Even Mrs. Bloomer might have shown some quality or other which was not quite detestable ; and Jack, or Joe —or, devil take him ! Philpot himself—might have proved something short of a Caliban. She had cast a blight over all the country, and he wondered at what o'clock next day the train started for London.

And yet it might have occurred to him that people who are disposed to be jealous, are not always disposed to be just. That Lucy had given the first shake to his dormant nature, and roused it into that state of chaos which seems a needful preliminary to all sorts of re-arrangement. She had given him a lesson, of which he might be sensible by-and-bye,

that a little real pain is a vast deal better than no feeling—inasmuch as it proves there is something to be pained, and some hope of a remedy.

Perhaps the mild influence of a summer afternoon and a lovely landscape, which should all have been the inheritance of the poor girl he had been judging so harshly, tended to soften down these asperities, for it was not long before his troubled aspect began to give way to a change more becoming. Perhaps he chanced to experience that, in the language of some of his club, bad blood cannot long maintain the race in which it is matched against better; and perhaps he stumbled upon the recollection that Lucy had never seen him till that morning, and was therefore certainly not accountable to him for anything that had passed before. Her position was surely such as might excuse her for preferring any other that might offer. She was very young and very desolate, and had no advisers but such as were more likely to lead her wrong than right. It must have been a hard heart that could make no allowance for her, and an ungenerous one that could dwell upon self-inflicted mortifications, to the exclusion of all sympathy. Crowley's was neither the one nor the other. After all, he had relied upon nothing but the authority of his aunt, who prided herself upon thinking differently from everybody else. And so he looked at his watch and found it was only seven o'clock, and just the time to take a pleasant drive to Oakendell House, and forget as much as he could.

CHAPTER VII.

HE was soon reclining behind his handsome pair of bays, and passing through the village, which he found busy in the full enjoyment of Saturday evening. Little ragged troops were playing at leap-frog in the road, and lads and lasses were playing hide-and-seek in the sunny corners. The more opulent dealers in short cut and tobacco pipes were doing pretty well in the world ; and the butcher, and the baker, and the grocer, to judge by the old women who emerged from their tumble-down huts with loaves and rushlights, and loaded skewers, were doing better still. But all had their fortunes to make, and the most rising establishments had a declining tendency.

A little out of the village was a pretty cottage, covered tastefully with trellis-work and woodbine, and fronted by a neat little garden with beds of blooming flowers. A donkey with a side-saddle and a jackanapes in livery were standing at the ornamental wicket. That, thought Crowley, must be the happy individual that is christened after the favourite gentleman. As he passed, a broad, flabby face ap-

peared at the window; that, he thought, must be my brother godfather! Farther on, the yellow sandy road wound through the wilderness of broom, and there he beheld two ladies who had met a gentleman on horseback. One of them turned a fair face towards him as he approached, and would have been very pretty in any place from which Lucy Longland was absent. The other was engaged in conversation with the horseman, and in the act of giving him a letter. That, he thought—he was sure—was Lucy herself; and the horseman could be no other than the very good young man. It cost him a start, but he slightly slackened his pace to bow with a better grace. Lucy seemed to colour as she smiled and returned his salutation, and when he had passed he leant back again and left the bays to drive themselves.

“ So, she gives him a letter, filled with everything that could not be said before her companion. My poor old aunt was right after all! That *must* have been the fellow, and the case is pretty far gone, for no time has been lost in meeting !”

The scenery from hence was very romantic, but it was lost upon him for the next mile. He then ascended some high ground and looked about him. To the right, the forest was endless; to the left, it sloped with intervals of cultivation and scattered groups of timber. Large tracts of every sort of undergrowth in fullest blossom were waving and undulating almost as high as the stunted thorns, and appeared to extend themselves to the blue line of the far off sea. At a short distance in this wild

valley rose a knoll of fir trees and holly, and untrimmed foliage more appropriate to the garden, and from the midst of these shot up the tall chimneys and pointed gables of an old red-bricked residence, overgrown with verdure. The fantastic style of building, with its tracery of grotesque ornament and narrow windows, all winking in the glare of the setting sun, bore evidence of the lucubrations of those by-gone architects who, with all their gifts, seem never to have known their own minds. It also recalled the “maiden throned by the west,” who was very often in the same predicament.

“That,” thought Crowley, “must be Oakendell House;” wherewith he took the road to it, and felt he had never seen anything to suit him better.

Mrs. Rokins and her nice-looking Sukey had finished their daily occupations and were just enjoying their cup of tea, when the strange gentleman drove up to the griffins that guarded the entrance—handsome, heavy, and whimsical, but too strongly constructed to have suffered so much dilapidation as might have been expected. The doors were immediately thrown open by the stout elderly dame, who had pulled the tail of her gown out of her pocket holes, and primmed herself out as she ran to anticipate the bell, and looked precisely in keeping with the walls.

“I presume,” said Crowley, “I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Rokins, and that this is Oakendell House?”

“Lord, sir,” she replied, showing two or three teeth with a smile of dilated wonder. “Your

honour has the advantage of me, and I dunno how you could have found the one or ever heard of the other! You are the first gentleman that has been here for going on for twenty year!"

"I hope we shall be all the better friends. I am come to request you will be good enough to show me the house, as I have some thoughts of living here."

"Deary me! I'm sure I hope you will! Some gentleman that Miss has brought with her from London, I durst to say?"

"I have had the pleasure of travelling in Miss Longland's company, and that is the cause of my giving you this trouble."

"Trouble, sir, for Miss Lucy! Blessings on her, we are a rough set about here, but the worst of us would give our lives to pick up so much as a pin for her! God send she's well, sir?"

"As well as you could wish, Mrs. Rokins; for I saw her on my way here. You seem to be well acquainted with her?"

"I ought, your honour; I've known her ever since she was born, and I might say long before, for I was laundress to Sir Harry and Lady Longland from their wedding day. But it's no use talking of that now. Things is changed, and I can't a-bear to think of them. Will you please to walk in, sir?"

He entered a handsome octagon-shaped hall, not very spacious, except in its altitude, which was only terminated by a skylight, with more quaint and cunning decoration of former days, and the finely-wrought figure of a bronze stork hovering in the

centre, and bearing what was once a gilded chain, with a nest of young ones, all stretching their necks and screaming fire. Around it turned a spiral staircase, protected by railing of the same glittering material, and cast in as many fancies of leaf and tendril as an arabesque. The walls were panelled curiously with carved oak, with which the floor was inlaid, and the whole was polished and slippery as ice.

Crowley expressed great surprise ; and, repeating the description he had heard from Lucy, demanded by what supernatural agency such renovation had been achieved. The well-pleased dame assured him there was nothing supernatural, for nothing could be less so than the will of everybody to serve Miss Lucy—except, indeed, Mr. Cheek, who went just contrariwise, and had done his best ever since Sir Harry went away to keep people from coming a-nigh the place.

“ Mr. Cheek ! The person of whom Mrs. Toogood has so high an opinion !”

“ Aye, sir ; the more’s the pity, for she has it all to herself. This house, your honour, used once to be a perfect diamond, and was always kept for the eldest son of the family, if so be he married—and the money that was laid out upon it—Ah, well well ; it’s all gone now—and it’s a pity, but Mr. Cheek was gone too—nobody cares where.”

“ Why, what has he done ?”

“ All the mischief he could, sir ; and that’s not a little. In the first place, neither he nor his father before him, ever since they came upon the property, had any thought but how they could wrong their

masters and turn everything to their own 'account ; and since the great break up he has got a thousand times worse, because he has had nobody to be afeard of. As soon as he was left the only man of confidence he turns his own bullocks into the gardens and his hogs into everywhere else ; and what's worse, he turns a wicked woman into the house, which was good enough for my masters, to drink gin and fright away all the neighbourhood."

" You astonish me ! And for what purpose was this ?"

" Just to prevent gentlefolks from hiring it, and keep it for himself. For I dunno how many years she drank gin here, sometimes with Mr. Cheek and sometimes without him. It was all one to her—and let this beautiful old house go to rack a-purpose. If any one told her she ought to be ashamed of herself she'd say she only obeyed orders ; and as all were in mortal fear of the agent there was none to speak about it. I tried more than once to rouse up the vicar, but he's a friend of Mr. Cheek's and forgets what's said as fast as he hears it ; and then I tried Miss Lucy ; but she, for some reason or other which I have never been able to make out, is more afeard than anybody else ; and so every think went to rot and ruin. But there was another sweetheart of that woman as was not far off, and had as good a right to her as Mr. Cheek. It's just three months since he fetched her away, and left the rest of her to a crowner's 'quest.'

" Upon my word, Mrs. Rokins, I owe you very much for this warning, for I should naturally have entered

into negotiations with the agent instead of troubling the young lady herself. But can you form no guess as to her reasons for dreading him so much?"

"No, sir, none. And the state into which I had the misfortune to throw her was enough to prevent me from ever speaking again. I can only fancy it is something as respects somebody else, for of Miss Lucy I know everything from her cradle."

"Do you think this somebody else is somebody in London?"

"Oh, no, your Honour! she never was in London till this week in all her life. But, as I was saying, the woman who died here, and was routed out by the coroner, got the house a bad name, and nobody would come to look after it till I offered to come myself for Miss Lucy's sake. You never see such a place. But I am a hearty old body, and can work as hard as a young 'un; and so I drove the hogs out of the drawing-room, and shovelled out the dirt, and took to soap and brushes, with my daughter Sukey to help me, and as many more as I could get after their day's work was done; and all for love, for Mr. Cheek has never come to see us and never paid us a penny. If he had know'd what we was about, it's odds but he'd have put a stop to it."

"Does Miss Longland know this?"

"Not she, poor dear! She'd have given us the bright eyes out of her blessed head, and she hasn't got more than enough to buy a ribbon for it. But if so be you take this house—well, sir, I won't say what would hurt her feelings—will your Honour please to look into the drawing-room?"

Crowley followed her in.

“ You see, sir, there was no papering to soil, and the fine carpets and curtains we was obliged to burn. But it ain’t so bad neither.”

She had indeed done wonders. The substantial oak and its carvings had withstood all injuries, and panel and floor, and elaborate chimney-piece and window frames, and curious furniture, would have driven a collector into raptures; everything was shining in the searching sun rays with a brilliancy that was only outdone by the happy glistening in the old woman’s eyes.

“ Mrs. Rokins, I need look no farther. My mind is made up.”

“ Oh ! but you haven’t seen the dining-room opposite, nor the ’tother sitting-room, nor the libry, nor nothing at all yet.”

He could not withstand that honest pride, and was hurried all over the house, which improved at every step.

“ And now, your Honour, I’m only afraid you’ll be daunted with the out-buildings. There’s plenty of stables, and all that, but what with the bullocks and the pigs, they want more hands than I can find.”

“ But they are to be had for money.”

“ Oh, yes, your Honour, as many as you like for money ; but there’s the mischief.”

“ Put on a score of the best fellows you can find, and refer them to me. And where’s the nearest place to find an upholsterer ?”

“ There’s a first-rate one, sir, at Lympton ; seven miles off.”

"Then send somebody to bring him here on Monday morning, with all the best furniture he has."

"Lord bless you, sir! But the rent—may be that mightn't suit."

"Well, Mrs. Rokins, I dare say it will not be ruinous."

"Mr. Cheek has never fixed any yet, because he never wanted a tenant; but when the premises was all at their best, four or five-and-twenty years ago, Sir Harry's father let it to a gentleman for a terrible deal—as much as two hundred pounds a year."

"Well, then, my dear good Mrs. Rokins, as times are more expensive now, suppose we say three."

"Lawk a mercy! your Honour cannot be in earnest. Three hundred a year for Miss Lucy."

"If that's not enough we'll make it more. But mind, I shall want a housekeeper, and, I hope, a lady's maid, and make it a condition that you and pretty Sukey remain where you are. And now tell me who is this coming here on horseback?"

Poor Mrs. Rokins was almost screaming with transport, and her eyes were blinded, but a wipè of her apron enabled her to make out that it was "young Mr. Philpot."

"So," thought Crowley, "adventures thicken." But he felt a new sensation, the first thrill that he was not living in vain, and he found it the next best thing to the love of Lucy.

"Have you no one to hold his horse? I should like to make Mr. Philpot's acquaintance."

The good woman rushed into the stable yard.

"Here, Jack ! Jack Rokins, where are you, boy ?"

Our friend Jack, whom the reader will recollect for his polite message to Mr. Cheek a few hours since, was not far off, and Mr. Philpot dismounted. He was by no means the monster of high-lows and corduroys that Crowley had imagined, though not less rural. He looked shy and rosy red, and a little swollen in the cheeks, as if he had just escaped from the Thugs with a double twist of a white cravat, and the same cause would have accounted for the expression of his eyes, which were squeezed up to some resemblance of the Guinea pig; but with these exceptions, and the close cropping of the village hair-dresser, he was more sinned against than sinning. It would be hard to call any man to account for the misdeeds of a provincial tailor, after he has once borne them on his back.

"I believe, sir," said Crowley, with a good-natured advance, "I owe you an apology for touching your horse with my wheel as I passed you on the road. I trust there was no damage."

"Oh, none, sir ; not in the least. Quite the contrary ! I have to apologize to you for intruding when you are busy with Mrs. Rokins ; but I have been commissioned to give her a note from Miss Longland."

Mrs. Rokins retired a step to break it open, when something tumbled out which proved to be a sovereign. What a tinge of shame it brought into Crowley's cheek. The letter then was not a collection of raptures for Mr. Tom Philpot, but a sweet

little deed of charity of which he had been made the messenger. Tom looked handsome from that moment.

“Look here, sir,” said the proud old woman, “Here’s a better observation on my young lady’s nature than the like of me can make. She never has a bit of gold in her hand but it’s laid out in a blessing. I’m sure if Squire Philpot was not so good as to ride about of her errands her blessed feet would wear out long before her heart.” With which she again tried to make out the few hasty lines.

“You have a very enviable office, Mr. Philpot, in being Miss Longland’s almoner. There are few who would not be proud of it.”

“That’s very true, sir; and I’m lucky there’s nobody hereabouts to take it off my hands.”

Tom’s fair face flushed as if it would smoke. It might have been with the incense of adoration, or it might have been from natural bashfulness, which had never before been scrutinized by such a keen observer, but Crowley was too much ashamed of the mistake he had made to risk another quite so soon. He felt Lucy’s new mystery too charmingly accounted for to admit a question of anything she did. What might be the degree of admiration she excited in all who knew her was no fault of hers, and could be no reasonable concern of his, since he was fully convinced there were no two ways of thinking of her. And so, as Mr. Tom Philpot’s good-natured and unpretending face could not by any conjuration be fitted to the shoulders of an enemy,

a little self-reproach suggested that it might not be altogether unsuitable to those of a friend. Further conversation about the place and the neighbourhood and its sporting capabilities, with many other things which usually engage the interest of a new comer, improved this impression so much that when Crowley found it time to return to his aunt he had still something further to say.

“Allow me to ask, Mr. Philpot, whether you are going back to Broome Warren?”

Mr. Philpot was going there, and lived within half a mile of Mrs. Toogood.

“Why, then, as you have begun the evening with a good office for my future landlady, I dare say you will forgive me for begging another for her tenant.”

“Anything in the world, sir.”

“Then do let me beg, as the first thing, that you will trust your horse to my groom, and allow me to drive you back.”

Tom was perfectly happy; and in such a glow of gratitude for the good fortune of Lucy, that he would have been equally so to transact any business Mr. Crowley might have at the North Pole.

As they stepped into the phaeton, Mrs. Rokins received her last instructions to consider the house and all belonging to it as let from that day, without any reference whatever to Mr. Cheek, and to restore everything to what she recollects it in better days. A touch of the rein, and the bays were off again, leaving the worthy lady gazing with astonishment at something very bright in her palm, and vowing

to Sukey that there never was such a gentleman before, and never would be such another.

They had not proceeded far before Mr. Philpot confirmed the character which had been given of the agent in every particular.

“I’ve known him from a boy,” he said, “and I never heard anybody speak a good word for him, except—if you’ll be good enough to excuse me—Mrs. Toogood, who is a very charitable lady, and takes him up, I believe, because everybody else has dropped him; though I should be ungrateful to see any harm in that, because she has taken me up too, seeing that very few of the gentry hereabouts have thought it worth while.”

“It would be hard,” replied Crowley, amused at his new friend’s candour, “if she were not right once in a way. But about this Cheek. Is there any obligation, do you know, why I should enter into negotiations with him respecting Oakendell?”

“Not the least, Mr. Crowley. I am not much of a hand at business, but I happen to know something about this, because people talk a great deal about it. When Sir Harry left the country, a good many years ago, Cheek was appointed receiver of the rents for his creditors, but only for the Broome Warren estate. Oakendell was delivered up to Mr. Bloomer for the use of Miss Longland, till she might become of age to manage it for herself.”

“Is she of age yet?”

“I cannot quite say, but I wish it may be so; for Mr. Bloomer, ever since his foolish marriage, has taken to bad habits, and become quite incapable of

transacting affairs of any kind; so that Cheek, without other authority, has filled his place."

"And from that, Mr. Philpot, with your assistance, I mean to turn him out."

"There's nothing that would give me greater pleasure." And honest Tom dropped a glance upon his fist.

"I fear we cannot call upon him for his wilful damage, because the responsibility would rest on Mr. Bloomer; but we'll prevent him from doing any more. Has the principal property suffered in the same way?"

"Quite as far as he could make it; though, being liable to inspection from those who draw the rents, he has been compelled to keep up better appearances. Still it pays him a fortune for its ruin, and has lost more than half its value in the time of Sir Harry."

"Has Miss Longland no other relation to look to her father's affairs?"

Tom shook his head sadly. "Not one, since the family misfortunes. The worst of it is, I don't think she would appeal to any one if she could, though she sees Cheek's rascality as plainly as other people do, and evidently holds him in great horror. He seems to have some spell on her which keeps her in constant alarm; so much so that, though I am often employed in her service, as you have just seen me, I have long been discouraged from mentioning his name."

"I heard the same from the good woman at Oakendell. Can you form no guess at the cause?"

"Not the most remote."

They drove on, pondering on this circumstance, till, approaching Broome Warren, Crowley again bethought him of the subject more immediately in hand. "I said that, with your assistance, I meant to be rid of him from Oakendell: and if you will oblige me, as you do Miss Longland, with a little of your agency, I shall be very thankful."

"Anything, Mr. Crowley, as I said before."

"Then pray be good enough to take the reins for a moment." Tom took them, and he continued: "It will deprive Mr. Cheek of one pretext for interfering if I pay my rent in advance; and, as luck would have it, I arrived too near dinner-time to change my dress, so that I happen to have my pocket-book here, with a supply for the next month or two." As he spoke he took out three notes. "Here, Mr. Philpot, are three hundreds; and the favour I have to beg is, that you will place them in the hands of Miss Longland, and announce me as her tenant, and shareholder in Mrs. Rokins and pretty Sukey."

"My dear sir!"

"Pray make her understand that this is the regular way of doing business, and that I will do my best to be a good tenant if she will not allow Mr. Cheek to turn me out. And now, as I know you are a sportsman, of which I saw evidence at my aunt's to-day, we must say a word on that matter. Can you tell the extent of the shooting attached to Oakendell?"

"Three or four thousand acres. I know the manor

well, for my father and I had entire liberty over it till Sir Harry went away and Cheek warned us off."

"Did he so? Then pray oblige me by warning *him* off. Or no—I must not make you enemies, and will do it myself. Remember you are Miss Longland's agent, with full liberty to kill all you can. But stay. Who are those ladies walking towards the vicarage?"

"Miss Longland herself and Miss Lightfoot."

"Then now's your time, my good sir. Catch them before they get home, and so escape Mrs. Bloomer."

Tom stopped the horses, and the servant trotted up with his own.

"Make haste! They are almost at the gate."

The message was too pleasant to need the recommendation, and the very unexpected allies took their separate directions in mutual admiration.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was now twilight, and Mr. Cheek, always exact in business, having carefully entered in a large ledger against his employers the last item of his claims for outlay, which consisted of five pounds for the workmen, had replaced it in a capacious tin box full of papers, and was gazing from the one window of his little damp and dark parlour in admiration of his manure-heaps, and impatience for his evening potation. A little inward comfort was indeed wanting, for there was not much around him. The walls appeared never to have seen any season but winter, and the furniture showed as many vicissitudes of travel, suggesting a variety of auctions and changes of residence, as the casualty-ward of a hospital, set apart for lame legs and broken backs. It must have been consoling to see the damsel who acted as his housekeeper make her entrance with a black bottle and the usual preparations for a comfortable tumbler.

She was a fine grown specimen of the forest, with not bad features, though they expressed rather too much of the wildness and determination of some-

thing newly captured and not very manageable. It was said that a great deal of this was put on to keep her present owner at a reasonable distance, but that he had ever shown a disposition to encroach upon it was not to be supposed of any gentleman honoured by the patronage of Mrs. Toogood. At all events he had shown no weakness by indulging her vanity in the article of dress, for if her eyes flashed with the unbroken spirit of the wilderness, there was nothing to contradict them in the article of grooming. There was no great observance of the usual etiquette between master and domestic; and indeed if there was any trace of subordination it appeared on the wrong side; a considerate allowance, no doubt, for untutored simplicity, though evil-minded persons had been known to say that it arose from certain apprehensions of how far those wild eyes might have observed matters not intended for them. Be that as it may, Mr. Cheek spoke in the pleasant tone which we sometimes adopt towards housekeepers of another breed.

“Why my good Nelly,” he said, “where have you been all this time?”

We will not endeavour to describe Nelly’s woodland language by the spelling, for her manner was seldom of a nature to tempt it. Her character was serious, and very often sad; in addition to which she just now showed indications of suppressed resentment.

“I have been where you sent me,” she replied: “to the public-house for this bottle of gin.”

“Very good, Nelly. I was only afraid something

had happened to you, for you have been gone these two hours."

"I dare say." Nelly was not profuse of respectful additions, which she only applied where she thought them due. "I have been on the bridge, talking to my little brother."

"What, little Tom Dabchick?"

"Him as you call so."

"Why, Nelly, that's as good a name as any other; and you see I can't call him by his own, nor you neither, because your father is such an out-and-out smuggler that it would never do for a magistrate to be known to harbour his family."

"And yet nobody gave him more encouragement till he was sent to prison, and was afterwards obliged to carry on his business in another part of the country."

"That's very true, Nelly; a man must live; and your father was in want of assistance. My charity very nearly got me into trouble."

"The kegs of brandy might have got you into worse, if all the world had known as much as I do."

Mr. Cheek looked at her suspiciously.

"And what do *you* know, Nelly?"

"It don't signify."

"Why, true enough; there's nothing for you to know which all the world does not know as well; but what do you fancy?"

"I fancy that if Mrs. Toogood could see the state to which your charities bring you every night, after spending the day in sending poor people to the

round-house for being tipsy, she'd find somebody else to give away her own."

"How do you know I lay out her charities?"

"I know she trusts you to do so, that's all."

"Come, come, my good girl; something has put you out of sorts."

"Something very often does. My little brother says you threatened to beat him."

"Is that all! Can't you understand a joke? Didn't I recommend him to his place with Mrs. Bloomer, and ain't it for his advantage that I should now and then give him a word of advice?"

Nelly was not quite sure upon that subject, and answered indignantly,—"I don't like Mrs. Bloomer's place for him. I won't have him scolded and starved, and I'd take him home if I had one. But it will soon be time for the acorns and blackberries, and little Tom and I, when we minded father's hiding-place for his kegs here in the forest, have too often made ourselves comfortable under an oak tree to care much about other shelter."

"What, leave me? You've no idea of such a thing! Tom has been telling you a pack of nonsense!"

"You'll find some of it true, at any rate. He told me what the church bells have been ringing for all the afternoon."

"Why, because Mother Bloomer set them going for her return home."

"She set them going, but not for herself."

"No?—for what else?"

"For the gentleman that Miss Lucy brought from London."

"A gentleman!" And Mr. Cheek was all attention. "What gentleman do you mean?"

"I don't know his name, but he's a very nice looking one; and shamed enough I was when he stopped his beautiful carriage at the door of the Longland Arms to ask his way to Oakendell."

"To Oakendell?"

"Yes, and he chucked me a crown piece to buy a better pair of shoes for telling him."

"What did he want at Oakendell?"

"The bar-maid said his servant had told her that Mrs. Toogood's servant had told him that the new gentleman was come to live there."

"Live there! will he! I should like to see him! Who's to live there without leave of the agent? and that's me! Who else can let it to him?"

"Nobody, I suppose, except the owner, and that's Miss Lucy. So, if you're thinking about her, as everybody says you are, you had better make haste."

If Nelly wished to retort the discomposure which Cheek had caused her brother, she could not have done it more effectually. It did not seem to concern her much, for she went on to say that the stranger was gone to look at the place, and she hoped it would suit him, because it would be handy for Miss Lucy, and because the servant had said he was very rich, and Mrs. Toogood's nephew."

"Mrs. Toogood's nephew?" It was an awkward climax. "I don't believe a word of it, for I saw

her this afternoon, and she said nothing about nephews ! As for his seeing the place, old mother Rokins daren't show it without my order!"

"Not unless she has Miss Lucy's."

Mr. Cheek had very quickly bubbled up to a boiling heat, and he bounced from his chair to the great risk of his tumbler.

"Get out of the way !" he exclaimed. "Where's my hat ? I must go and see about this."

"If the gentleman should come whilst you're away, what am I to tell him ?"

"Tell him not to bother !" And he pushed her aside and stamped out of the room.

But he was not destined to go far. When he banged open his front door he found a man standing before it and feeling for a bell or a knocker, for which he might have felt a long time. His back being to the sky, and his front in deep shadow, there was no making out who or what he was, except that he was taller and broader than any one in the village.

With his usually urbane manner, when pressed for time and provokingly arrested, he demanded—
"Who the devil are you ?"

The shadow replied in a calm, deep voice,—"You had better look at me and see. I've had so many names that I don't know which is my own. But I know yours, though I have not seen you for a good while. How are you, Squire Christopher Cheek, since we parted a dozen years ago ?"

Whatever it was, there was something that very much startled Mr. Cheek in this address. His face,

which had before been pale with rage, was now pale with panic, and he almost tumbled backward for something to support him.

“Bless me!” continued the shadow, “I come too suddenly! You thought me dead, perhaps, for old acquaintance are not apt to be so long out of sight.”

Cheek turned his eyes over his shoulder, and there was Nelly just behind him.

“Hullo!” he gasped, “what are you doing here? Go along to the kitchen and mind your business.”

The girl looked in great astonishment, but did as she was bidden.

“Aaron Daunt!” he resumed, quite out of breath, “I never thought to see your face again! I could never find a soul who knew what had become of you!”

“Indeed, Mr. Cheek! It was very good of your worship to make so many enquiries. I should hardly have thought myself worth the trouble.”

If a slight mixture of irony might have been traceable, Mr. Cheek did not think fit to notice it, and showed how far it was misapplied.

Aaron followed him into his parlour, where the light had remained burning. His height was six feet and two or three inches more, and his figure was broad and brawney in proportion, though nothing but huge bones and tawney skin, of which the motley covering was in the rudest style of destitution. Of his face there was not much to say, for it seemed never to have been shaved, and not very

recently washed ; but it had a resolute dash—jeering and defiant, which was more especially expressed in a pair of fierce black eyes. He might have been forty years old or thereabouts, and as he flung himself into a chair and threw what had once been a fur cap upon the table, the lines of toil and trouble bore witness that fortune had jolted him on her roughest road. Few people would have envied Mr. Cheek the possession of such a friend ; but, to be original, there is no accounting for tastes. He had done his best to recover his presence of mind, though his wrinkled countenance still looked as if it had been carved out of chalk.

“Take something to drink, Aaron, before you say a word, for you seem to have come a long way.”

He filled his big tumbler to the brim, and it was quite as quickly empty.

“And now,” he said, resuming his place, “where have you been all these years, and how is it that I see you in such miserable plight ?”

“Well, Mr. Cheek, it is quite a comfort to see an old friend so anxious about me. I dare say you have often seen me in your dreams since that last parting ?”

“Don’t allude to that, don’t. There were circumstances which remain as much a mystery as ever, and will remain so always. It is a painful subject, and there’s no good in referring to it.”

“May be not, at this moment. Is Mr. Downton’s nephew alive—Captain Samuel Cox ?”

“Not that I know of. I have not seen him these

twelve years. Take another glass whilst I get you something to eat."

"Aye, that will be something new. It is many a day since I was asked to eat and drink. Look at my bones. There's more hard work there than meat and drink. And the carrion crow that picked them was that same Captain Cox. I'll tell you more about it when I'm not famished."

"We'll bring you round, Aaron; we'll bring you round."

"Will you?" he replied, as if he took the words in some sense of his own, "we shall see."

Mr. Cheek left the room on his hospitable mission. In the kitchen he found Nelly, patching up the rags of her little Tom, and a withered old woman, three parts blind, and often four parts deaf, just as the wind blew, who filled the office of cook, for which she had been qualified by many years' practice in the workhouse. Nelly did not think it necessary to rise from her chair, and Nanny Tuck, as her companion was called, was huddled half-way up the chimney, and muttering confidentially to the smoke-jack.

"Nell," said her master, "can the old woman hear to-night?"

"No," replied the housekeeper.

"Then make her understand we want some supper."

The command was received with a look of surprise that Cheek should think of supping in such company; and he seemed puzzled to account for it.

"Come," he said, with a coaxing effort, "don't be in the tantrums, and I'll give you a new gown some day. That's an old friend of mine in the parlour, who has been robbed and stripped on the highway, and obliged to borrow clothes of a scare crow. I thought he was dead years ago, and was quite as much astonished as delighted to see him. But don't you say anything about him, d'ye hear, for it might prevent us from catching the thieves."

The story met with as much belief as might have been expected, which Nelly proved by remarking that he looked as much afraid of his old friend, now that he appeared in skin and bone, as he did when he thought him a ghost.

"Nonsense, Nelly, great pleasure is always agitating. But, d'ye hear?"

"Yes, I hear."

Mr. Cheek paused, as if he wished her to say more, but if more was passing in her mind she chose to keep it to herself. A physiognomist, however, might perhaps have read in her face that she feared her master might have been guilty of some great delinquency, and that this stranger knew something about it. But she was asked no more questions, under the belief, it might be, that questions are apt to create suspicions.

"Well, Nelly, shake up the old woman, and then be a good girl, and shake up a bed."

"A bed!" repeated the girl.

"Yes—what surprises you?"

"Oh! nothing; only that in your hurry to see

the Oakendell gentleman you forgot to lock up that box you are so fond of. As this is a friend of yours perhaps he can read, that's all."

Cheek made no reply, and one stride took him back to his parlour. But all was safe. Mr. Daunt had walked too far to be curious, and the bottle had been a trusty guardian.

"Well, Mr. Cheek," he said, with an independence much at variance with his appearance, "we have a good many people to talk of; what has become of Sir Harry Longland?"

"Ah! poor Sir Harry! He went abroad, as you remember, and has never yet returned."

"Where is he?"

"I've not the slightest notion."

"Is he alive?"

"Yes, he's alive."

"How do you know?"

"Because he writes to me now and then for money."

"And how do you know where to send it?"

Mr. Cheek bore these sharp questions with a patience for which we should hardly have given him credit.

"The letters come through various banking houses, sometimes in one part of the world and sometimes in another. Sir Harry is never stationary for he has creditors everywhere."

"I must find him out, for I've something to say to him."

"Perhaps I can say it for you, Aaron, when I forward the next remittance?"

"No, would you though?" The jeering look was almost a laugh. "That's very good of you, but I should be sorry to give your worship so much trouble. Mind, you are spilling your glass. Your hand used to be more steady; and what has become of that pretty innocent little daughter? Is she with her father?"

Cheek looked more and more uneasy, busied himself in putting away his box, and seemed not to hear; but the question was repeated, "Did she go abroad with her father?"

"Eh? oh, no! I believe not; perhaps she went to him from London the other day."

"Where has she been living?"

"Where has she been living? Oh! here—here in the village—a little while ago."

"What, with her uncle, Mr. Bloomer?"

"Yes, with Mr. Bloomer, of course."

"He is still living then?"

"Yes, oh, yes! he's living."

"I'm glad of it. I must go and see him."

"It's of no use, Aaron. He won't know you. He has quite lost his faculties by hard drinking."

"Perhaps the young lady may have a better memory."

There was a long uncomfortable pause, which Aaron interrupted by enquiring what his worship was dreaming about.

"Dreaming? Oh, only wondering what you can have been doing all these years."

"Is that all? Well, I'll tell you: you have not forgotten, I dare say, that I was Mr. Downton's——"

Cheek make an uneasy movement. “Don’t speak of that man—I cannot endure his name!”

“I’m not surprised.”

“He was the ruin of poor Sir Harry?”

“Oh, that’s the reason? Well, there’s no mistake there. But if you don’t like to hear about him, we’ll take a step further back and then a step further on. People have often wondered who I may chance to be, but no one has wondered half so much as I myself. There’s a story of a flock of peewits being seen rather more than forty years ago, by the jockey boys at exercise on Newmarket Heath. Not knowing what the screaming and pouncing down upon a particular spot could mean, they rode up to see; and there they found a red cloak with a baby wrapped up in it—a piece of luggage rather too cumbersome for some pretty gypsy who had been telling fortunes at the races, just over. Somebody took me up and cantered me over to the training stables, and I turned out a good horseman from that first lesson. They made me a nest in the hayloft, and fed me upon oat-meal gruel and bran-mashes, and when I got to be five stone, I was celebrated amongst the feather weights.”

“Wonderful,” said Cheek, who was thinking intently upon something else.

“Wasn’t it? The first great race I won was for Mr. Downton, whose colt was good enough to run away with me and make my fortune. His master was so taken with my jockeyship and promising stable education, such as lying, swearing, and swaggering, that he took me to his own private establish-

ment, where worse example made a better man of me, and raised me from a squalid young rascal to a respectable man of confidence. It was about that time that you used to see me here, when Mr. Downton came down to visit Sir Harry, and, as I afterwards found out, to ruin him; and now we arrive at a period which you don't like to talk about."

"No, Aaron, no," replied his worship, not altogether deceived by a hollow joviality through which he was conscious of a glance of over-much observation. "No—pass that by."

"As you please, sir—the rest of my story is not very long, though it goes just round the world. From Mr. Downton I went to his nephew, Captain Cox. The nephew was quite as fast upon the turf as the uncle had been, and used to take me the round of all the races to help him make his book and collect his bets. Some paid, and some didn't, but all swore they did, and I was accused of turning a few hundreds to my own account which I had never received. Well, what do you think he did? Of course, this is the first time you ever heard of it? He had me up before a judge and jury, and transported me for ten years!"

"You! Transport you! Why didn't you apply to me for a character?"

"Aye," said Aaron, "an oversight, wasn't it? I knew I was not guilty and was fool enough to think that sufficient; but if honesty failed to do me a good turn then, we'll trust her for a better before we are much older. Your worship does not understand, and there's no great reason that

you should. But look you to the large amount of debts I have collected since Captain Cox sent me across the world to search for them ! In not one item of which shall I be found a defaulter ! Look you to the chains about my wrists ; the links to thieves and cutthroats ; the community with shame and devilry ; the wrench from the land I loved, though it gave me small cause, but the fair character I had earned in it. Look you to ten years of slavery, for one who would not have sold an hour of freedom for an age of gold ! Look you—I could say, but that a convict's brain must not look back—to the state of one who howled to change natures with the dog that bayed the moon ! These are rich entries in my long account ! Add them together and tell me the amount of ten years' daily collection. I've brought it all ; all carefully invested in these fingers ; and all to be delivered. Ha, ha ! You cannot make me out ! We learn a strange way of talking on that other side of the world ; and are better understood by what we do than what we say."

Mr. Cheek's presence of mind was not much improved by this wild talk ; but while he was stammering his astonishment, Nelly came to his aid with a smoking dish, and the conversation naturally took another channel.

CHAPTER IX.

MANY girls in Nelly's position, and under the odd circumstances, might have allowed their curiosity to take some liberties with the key-hole ; but in her case there was too much instinctive pride for the perpetration of anything that might bring her to shame, and too much occasion to think of her own prospects for any desire to trouble her head with the goings on of other people, when they were not forced upon her. What she knew of Cheek already was more than she wanted to know, and what she had just witnessed was enough to convince her that nothing better was to be looked for. It seemed ominous of some shadow upon that never very promising roof which must drive her and the urchin, for whom she was still and always using her spare moments, once more to the wild woods, to live as the birds did, but without their wings to fly from the bitter winter. They had no other resource. They had no mother to go to, and their father was too much engaged in a nefarious life by the sea, and daily escapes from justice to remember their existence, since he had placed them in their present

homes. Other service was hopeless, with such recommendations, and the labour of the fields after what she had seen of the village girls and their clowns with whom it would mingle them, was worse than starvation; for Nelly, under all her disadvantages, was a moral and good girl.

Amidst these melancholy thoughts and a silence only broken by the passing of her thread through the homely material she worked upon—for old Nanny was dead asleep—she was disturbed by a low tap at the entrance door. She knew it to be the tap of the vicar, for she had heard it too often and had too often had occasion to pity the consequence of his visits to her master. For this night, at least, there was a hope of sending him home in a state less lamentable, and she stole silently to the door to send him away with the information that Mr. Cheek was engaged. But the vicar, in his quiet tremulous accent, assured her that he did not mean to stay more than a minute, and had been sent by Mrs. Bloomer on something very particular. Doubting whether she was right or wrong, Nelly reluctantly opened the parlour door and ushered in the portly ruin of the Reverend Mr. Bloomer.

Cheek staggered out of his chair with a confused and disconcerted look, as if this unexpected meeting of his two friends were the last thing on earth he desired. For, independent of the conversation that would most probably ensue and which he had shown so much anxiety to prevent, it required no small adroitness to shape his own in such a fashion as might secure him from evil construction on both

sides. The task, indeed, as regarded the lynx-eyed Aaron, was next to impossible, and therefore his only hope was to make sure of the purblind vicar, and shut up his eyes before they had time to make unpleasant recognitions.

“How do you do, Mr. Bloomer?” he said, with the bland reception, very proper for the venerable pastor. “This is just like your benevolent care for your flock. Pray take a seat in this easy chair; and as you could not have failed to wet your feet in crossing my yard, oblige me by drinking this glass of weak spirits and water which I was just mixing for myself.”

“Thanks, Mr. Cheek,” replied the feeble Mr. Bloomer, “you are always so hospitable! But I fear I interrupt——”

“Oh, nothing of the kind! This is an excellent friend of mine who has just escaped some perilous adventures by sea, and has no business except with his supper, to which I hope he will attend without minding us. Your Reverence will set him a good example by taking your glass.”

His Reverence meekly took the hint which he would perhaps not have required had he not been fixed in a gaze of wonderment on the excellent friend, whom of course there was no danger of his recognising through such a forest of hair and tatters.

“I beg to drink my service to you, sir,” he said, “and congratulate you on your escape, which appears to have been very miraculous.”

Aaron thanked him with much more respect than

he had displayed hitherto, and resumed his very necessary employment with an expression of concern for the poor old man, so woefully altered since they had last met. He made no attempt to recall himself to his memory, for which the presence of Mr. Cheek seemed undesirable, and continued his meal in silence, though in close observance of what passed.

“That is a very genuine spirit,” resumed his Reverence, after he had duly qualified himself to judge. “Very soothing to the nerves, that I have found so excitable during the last few years.”

“I am delighted to perceive it, Mr. Bloomer. A sudden access of pleasure arising from the return of Mrs. Bloomer is very likely to have caused a return of the palpitation you have so often complained of. Allow me to pour a small drop more into your glass. We must take care of you, my dear sir, for it is a great blessing to spend a profitable hour with you after devoting a whole day to people whose thoughts are fixed on this world only.”

Aaron looked up from his plate with a smile of disdain; but the Vicar’s perceptions were not so acute.

“Ah,” replied his Reverence, “I’m afraid there are too many such persons. All we can do is to pray for better things.”

“I assure you, worthy sir, I do pray for better things, very devoutly.”

“No doubt—no doubt. When one sees your exemplary attention to divine service one cannot

help wondering how there can be a failing Christian about us. But it is a wide subject, and your mention of Mrs. Bloomer reminds me that I am sent upon a little matter of more temporal concern."

"Excuse me, Mr. Bloomer, your temporal concerns are the duty of your flock. You have too much to do with your spiritual ones to give a thought to them; and if your constitution were to break down, heaven only knows what would become of us."

"I do my best, Mr. Cheek; I do my best; that certainly is a very good glass of spirits."

"It won't hurt you. It is very old, and the strength has quite evaporated. Suffer me to pour in a leetle more, for you can hardly taste it."

"Thank you; I do my best."

"If we might judge from your discourse last Sunday, your best gets better and better."

"Does it indeed! I'm glad you think so, for I have a great reliance on your opinion. I feared I was failing a little. Mrs. Bloomer thinks I should do better without this restorative, and that I ought to take nothing but water."

"Ah, Mrs. Bloomer is an excellent lady, and water is certainly very good—in its way; but your Reverence has often told us from the pulpit that all the blessings of this life are of a mingled nature, for fear we should grow too fond of them. As I never forget what you say, I think, with submission, that we are bound to mix water, like the rest, with a

dash of juniper, or something of that kind, to prevent excess."

"True, Mr. Cheek, very true. You are very attentive—an exemplary Christian." With which the good man disposed of half his second tumbler, and Cheek persisted for a mortal half-hour in fencing off the object of the visit; but he did not succeed in the end, for the Vicar was as much afraid to return home without delivering his message as his friend was determined not to hear it, till the mystifying effects of gin-and-water had made the needful preparation.

After very many indistinct repetitions of "Mrs. Bloomer—commissioned me—something—don't exactly remember—'bout tithes," Mr. Cheek seemed to think he might venture to attend to it.

"Tithes! Oh, yes, of course! I don't know where I should go to if I were ungrateful enough to forget the tithes. I've a litter of ten beautiful little pigs, and Mrs. Bloomer shall have her tenth to-morrow morning, all ready for the bakehouse. Perhaps your Reverence will have the goodness to say so, with my respectful compliments."

"Yes, thank 'ee—if I don't forget—I'm very forgetful." And he put the tumbler again to his lips and turned it bottom upwards. "Thank 'ee—I won't take any more."

And truly there was no need for more!

Mr. Cheek then drew out his pocket-book and wrote, with a pleasant smile, "Received this 30th of July, the amount of tithes due to me from Christopher Cheek, Esq." To which Mr. Bloomer,

unmindful of a large amount of arrears, affixed his hardly legible signature.

“And now,” he attempted to say, “think Mrs. Bloomer—niece Lucy—wonder where I’ve got to—says that always lose tithes coming home—take care this time.”

“Yes, my dear sir; button up your pockets. You must take more care.”

“Yes—more care.”

He made an exertion to get up, but dropped down upon his seat again.

“Don’t know how it is—very infirm! Go home—correct sermon for to-morrow.”

“Ah, sure to be a stunner. I hope to see you a bishop before long! Here, Nell!”

Nelly answered the call.

“Take the lantern and see Mr. Bloomer across the yard. I’m afraid it’s a little dirty.”

“No, no,” said Aaron, rising hastily. “My arm, with your worship’s leave, can do it better, now he has such a weight of tithes to carry.”

“Lord, Aaron,” replied Cheek, with a side whisper, and an affected smile of ridicule, “can’t you see the joke?”

“No,” answered Aaron, “I’ll be shot if I can.”

“Why, it is only to show him to-morrow how easily evil-disposed persons may impose upon him, and to cure him of his bad habits. You can’t go out again to-night — you can’t indeed. You are worn out already.”

“Your worship is very considerate; but I can go

a hundred yards still. Come, Mr. Bloomer, allow me to assist you."

The old broken-down man availed himself of the offer with so much thankfulness, that Cheek could interpose no farther obstacle, and Nelly lighted them out, not unmindful of her master's look, which signified anything but concern for the renewed exertions of his highly-prized friend. When she had guided them across the yard, her consideration for the helpless vicar, and alarm at the doubtful hands to which he had confided himself, induced her to extinguish the light and follow them at a short distance. She could not, therefore, help hearing their conversation, and it tended a good deal to alter her first idea of Aaron. He performed his good office with a care and gentleness that surprised her, and his occasional words were exceedingly respectful.

"Will you please, sir, to lean a little heavier—the road is rough."

"Thank 'ee, Mr.—don't know who—I'm very weak."

"I'm very sorry to perceive it, sir—heavier, if you please."

"You are very good—very strong—that's a very exemplary—Christian."

"Whom do you mean, sir?"

"Him—Misser Cheek—always sings the Psalms. Very liberal of his spirits—in mod-ration."

And thus they arrived at the garden entrance of the vicarage. There they found the ever-watchful Lucy, who seldom trusted her uncle out

of her sight, and had now begun to be very uneasy.

“ Oh, uncle,” she said, in a low and mournful voice, “ you promised me you would not stay a minute, and I have waited for you almost an hour.”

“ Where—where’s Mrs. Bloomer ?”

“ Gone to bed.”

“ Pro-vidence very merciful ! Mustn’t disturb her —tongue—rouse the parish.”

“ Come uncle, come in !” And she took his vacant arm to help him to the house, where his servant was waiting to put him to bed. When they came to the light she was startled to see him under the protection of a stranger to the village, and one of such a ruffianly appearance ; but having consigned the vicar to other hands, she remained to express her thanks for the service he had received, and was taking out her purse.

“ No, Miss Longland, if I may be so bold. My blessing and my thanks ; but nothing more from the house of Sir Harry Longland.”

Lucy started, and looked him earnestly in the face.

“ What mean you ? What know you of Sir Harry ?”

“ I knew him for a noble gentleman—would to God I had not. I was servant to one who made but an ill return for his friendship.”

“ To whom ? Tell me to whom ?”

Aaron hesitated.

“ Come away from the door. This way—there—now tell me who you are.”

“ My name is Aaron Daunt.”

“ Aaron, do you say ? Aaron ? I seem to have heard that name before.”

“ You were almost an infant, Miss Longland, when you heard it last. Young enough to be borne on this arm. But I fear to tell you the name of my master, lest I share his reproach.”

“ Fear nothing, but tell me.”

“ His name was Downton.”

The perturbed expression of Lucy’s countenance became fixed and frozen, and her words were scarcely articulate.

“ For what purpose have you returned to this place ?”

“ To learn the address of Sir Harry.”

“ And for what purpose is that ?”

“ To tell him something of deep importance.”

“ Tell it to me.”

“ I cannot tell you yet. The links of my story are not complete, and I must see him. I have been in a far distant country, and it was only accident that informed me, just before I left it, of Sir Harry’s many years’ absence. I have coupled that with some strange suspicions that occurred to me about twelve years ago.”

“ Tell me, in mercy, what you mean ?”

“ It is a secret which you would naturally be unable to keep, and which, prematurely divulged, would defeat a great object.”

“ Does Mr. Cheek know it ?”

“ He does, and will keep it safe enough.”

"Your manner is friendly, but your words are terrible."

"You shall speedily know their meaning if you will tell me where to find Sir Harry."

"I cannot—I do not know. My father has not written to me since I was a child. My only knowledge that he lives is through his agent."

"Do not place too much trust in that man."

"And why not?"

"Because I believe him to be a great villain."

"Tell me one thing, as you are human. Have I any cause to fear him?"

"None. If he dares to impress such a feeling upon you, stun him with the name of Aaron Daunt."

He suddenly stopped to listen.

"I heard a step outside these palings. He is not unlikely to have followed me, and he must know nothing of this conversation. To-morrow I shall be gone, but will soon return, when you shall know all. Heaven guard you, Miss Longland!"

He pulled off his cap with deep respect, and was gone. Of Lucy's astonishment we need say nothing.

When Aaron regained the mansion of Mr. Cheek, he found that gentleman waiting impatiently at the door, for fear, as he said, that he had lost his way; but he answered that he had only been looking about to recall old scenes, and walked into the room where he had left the bottle with the air of a person who felt himself quite at home.

Mr. Cheek inquired, after some hesitation, whether he had seen any of his family.

“Only a young girl,” he replied, “who took the Vicar off my hands, and was frightened at my gibbet-look. Your worship must help me to a refit from some of your own stores; as you seem to like them too long for you, perhaps I may not find them much too short. I shall want a razor too, and a pound or two of soap, and a few bank notes, or I shall hardly be a credit to you.”

Aaron must indeed have been wonderfully welcome, for Cheek had never been so obliging; though it was a peculiarity of his smile that it sometimes resembled a flash from a thundercloud. It was not very different when Nelly brought him a letter, which, as he read it, seemed to make the cloud still blacker.

“Is there any answer?” asked Nelly.

“No!” replied a roaring clap; and his worship crammed the fuse into his pocket, with a turbulent effort to look serene. If he could not quite succeed it was certainly an evening of provocations, for the letter ran as follows:—

“Mr. Crowley begs to inform Mr. Cheek that he has engaged Oakendell House, with the land and shooting attached, from Miss Longland, and will be obliged by the removal of the live stock and farming materials belonging to Mr. Cheek as early as convenient on Monday morning.”

We might have thought, from the manner of its

perusal, that it involved considerations of more importance than pigs and bullocks, but guesses are often wrong, and always perplexing, and we have quite enough to do in admiring the extreme urbanity with which Mr. Cheek conducted Aaron to his dormitory, after which, we are sorry to say, he was in no mood to retire to rest, but paced his room heavily backwards and forwards during the whole night.

CHAPTER X.

NOTWITHSTANDING his improved spirits on the preceding evening, Crowley made his appearance in the morning as if, in imitation of Mr. Cheek's bottle, their strength had much evaporated. His rest had not been much to speak of. It had been a great satisfaction to him that honest Tom Philpot, by a clever misrepresentation that such arrangements were perfectly regular, had prevailed on Lucy to accept his year's rent in advance; but then the more he saw of the said Tom the less became his first confidence that there was no danger in him. He had found him a great deal too good-hearted to be trustworthy, and the graces he wanted were not likely to be missed by eyes which had never seen such attractions. The worst of it was that, though there was abundance of simplicity, there was no vulgarity. A little of this, like a little alloy in gold, would have been a great acquisition; but Tom appeared to be pure ore, and malleable into anything. He was, moreover, sensible, when he was not ashamed to be so; whereas it was an important desideratum that he should be a blockhead. There

was no saying but Mrs. Toogood might have been correct in her suspicions. There was no argument against it, except that she was sure of it ; and upon this equivocal comfort Mr. Crowley joined her at breakfast.

The ceremony over, Mrs. Toogood thought dear James would like to get ready for church ; for dear James, we are sorry to say, had forgotten it was Sunday—a day which, with some compunction, he had generally passed at his club, or rather late in his bed, because his friends did so, considering its business the peculiar province of their mothers and sisters. To go to church was now a part of his new life, and he made it a point to do his duty.

The carriage was soon at the door, and moving churchward at a pace suited to the gravity of the day. If there was anything out of keeping it was perhaps a slight smile, at what Pall Mall might say if it saw him in a comfortable old coach, beside a respectable old lady, on his way to grow good. What pleasant comments would it make on the fat coachman and footman who overlapped the hammer cloth on both sides, and what comical questions of how the fat old horses, which found it so hard to waddle down hill would ever contrive to waddle up again !

The bells—two sharps and a flat—had long been exerting their ting, tang, tack to summon sinners and sweethearts, and gaffers and dames who had once been choice examples to both parties ; and the call on this fine morning was answered with more than common alacrity. It had been spread abroad

by Mrs. Bloomer that the fine gentleman she had imported from London would be exhibited in Mrs. Toogood's pew, and every tomb-stone was taken for the spectacle—every “rude forefather of the hamlet” seemed to stand erect upon his green hillock in the form of a fat sheep.

Crowley and his aunt were the first in their places. Then came the school children, tumbling up the stairs, and heels over head, to the gallery, with an old woman and a long stick behind them. Then the parish penitents, looking as innocent as the patriarchs bleating without, and wonderfully well behaved, seeing that they only practised manners once a week; and then, at intervals, dropped in the aristocracy.

Foremost of these was Mr. Christopher Cheek, consulting the stones as usual upon the praiseworthy question of how to make the rest of the world as good as himself. He took his seat close under the pulpit, and having plumped down upon his knees and crammed his face into his hat, in which he was perhaps reminded that patent silk was price four shillings and sixpence, staggered up again and began to thumb his hymn-book.

By another door glided in two ladies, one in her bloom and very pretty, the same who had been Lucy's companion on the previous evening, the other tall and yellow, with a drooping pair of eye-lids and a head gear on one side, as we have seen it in prints of operatic pastoral. She was at the turning point of beauty's prime, which has such a woeful propensity to turn the wrong way, and her cast of

features bore strong reference to the synagogue. These ladies, Mrs. Toogood whispered, were Miss Mary Lightfoot and Miss Penelope Pinhorn, commonly called half sisters, though, owing to sundry zig-zag parental marriages, no relations.

Not far behind the latter, followed the flaky locks and flabby face of a bulbous gentleman in black, with a turn-down shirt collar, and apparent ambition to resemble a sleepy lion ; though the big black eyes were more like a pair of ravens at roost. This was the donkey's godfather, Mr. Fozzard, a recent acquisition of the village from some region unknown.

Hard by was a precise little gentleman in dapper fittings of the same grave hue, and a neat white tie with an exquisite little bow which unmistakably advertised "Prescriptions carefully made up." This was Mr. Choke, the apothecary, on whose first-floor lodged the sleepy lion.

Near him, in green and brimstone and gilt buttons, and in imminent danger both of strangulation from his neck-cloth and a stab from his breast pin, was the rosy and right honest Squire Thomas Philpot.

There was not much else of importance till a private door opened and Lucy Longland followed the flaming folds of Mrs. Bloomer into the vicarage pew, where the first dropped meekly on her knees, and the second elevated her downy chin to observe the effect produced on that benighted community by the last London fashions.

Whilst Crowley was stealing a perilous glance at the kneeling figure, the vicar, with his red face much redder for the white surplice, tottered into the reading desk, and the singers lifted up their voices as if an ill-assorted pack had suddenly started a hare. The two or three in tune could make but little head against the twenty that were out; but there was this consolation, that if the latter were not likely to draw down the seraphs, their yells and contortions, with Mr. Cheek at the head, were quite enough to scare away an intruder who sometimes goes to church as well as everywhere else.

We pass over the service with a feeling of regret, and would have passed over Mr. Bloomer's first appearance in this history had subsequent events permitted us, for he was a good man, though weighed down by one heavy reproach. But as we have known many a good man weighed down by a dozen, we had rather look on him with pity than condemnation. We had rather plead what set-off we can in a disposition too yielding by nature and urged on by trials, which would probably have made our own sins a great deal the worst. Though his shattered intellect had long given ground for severe remark, it would have been hard to find a heart in the parish disposed to indulge in it. His helpless efforts to do his duty drew down no criticism beyond a common sorrow that, week by week, he was becoming less capable of it; and as village tongues could spare him we hope for charity else-

where. We must let this short appeal supply the place of both prayers and sermon.

On the present occasion there were more indications of concern than usual. The vicar's manner was more dreamy and his articulation less perfect, and his look was distressed and confused, with evident consciousness of something worse coming on. He often lost his place, and had many repetitions to make before he could recover it. Finally he lost it altogether, and was driven to a hasty and less audible conclusion, from which it would have been hard to extract any meaning.

The eyes of Lucy had never moved from him. They could see deeper than the rest of the congregation, and were trembling with tearful apprehension. Crowley's were fixed with the same momentary expectation of some more than ordinary event; and having previously arranged with his aunt that he should escape through a side door to elude Mrs. Bloomer and her threatened introductions, remained in his place till the church was cleared of all but the clerk and the two objects of his interest. He then rose, and passing down the aisle, slowly and more uneasy at seeing no sign of Mr. Bloomer's descent from the pulpit, came to Lucy, who had been remaining, as was her custom, to conduct her uncle home. She was gazing at the narrow stairs in great trepidation, and he stopped to whisper a hope that nothing was the matter. She could restrain her anxiety no longer, and sprang up to ascertain the cause of delay, which she announced with a thrilling cry. The vicar was leaning back in his seat, and to

all appearance lifeless; but Crowley was immediately by her side, and though scarcely less startled and almost as ignorant of what should be done, seized the old man's pulse and arrested her despair by the assurance that he was not dead. He was not one to lose his wits in extremities, and saw at a glance that the seizure must be either apoplexy or paralysis, and that the first consideration was to prevent a general alarm. The clerk, and his own groom who had been waiting for orders at the side entrance, were the only witnesses of the scene, and he immediately made the best use of them both. The first he sent off for the medical man, and the other, with his fleet pair of horses, to the county town for the best physician to be found.

The few moments of suspense were truly piteous. The vicar's eyes continued closed as if he were in profound sleep, and his limbs were motionless, except, from time to time, a convulsive start, whilst the veins in his temples were black and distended almost to bursting. Lucy was unconsciously supported by all the care that could be spared from her uncle, and the tears that streamed silently down her bloodless cheeks seemed a farewell to her last hope on earth. Neither of them spoke, for one was unable to speak, and the other was too eagerly intent upon the door by which he looked for assistance. Presently the messenger returned, and with him the village apothecary, whom we have before described. Fortunately, he was no bad specimen of his calling, and was more disposed to be useful than

talkative. He had gained a hasty knowledge of the particular necessity for him on his way, and had given his companion a few instructions, so that he had scarcely cast a look of alarm upon his patient when materials were handed to him for instant operation, and before answering a question he had opened a vein in the temple. The effect seemed better than his expectations. As the blood burst forth he turned to Lucy and said, "I think we are just in time."

"Are you sure? I conjure you, are you sure?"

"I hope so, but I must have assistance."

"My servant is gone for the nearest," said Crowley.

"To Lympton? Ten miles off. I hope we shall hold out."

The bleeding produced more signs of life, though none of consciousness, but it was time to stop it, and convey the scarcely-living old man to his home. For this purpose a litter was easily improvised by one of the church benches, with cushions from the pews; and Crowley supporting the principal weight and the doctor guiding the feet, he was borne down from the pulpit and placed in proper position. The clerk preceded them to warn the servants to make no commotion, and Lucy followed the slow transit. No one else perceived it, and as Mrs. Bloomer had occupation enough till the afternoon in spreading her London news through the whole circle of her acquaintance, there was not much fear of intrusion.

Having lifted their stricken burthen upon his bed

and dimmed the light to that sickly shade which many of us have such sad reason to remember, they sat in breathless contemplation of every change of feature which seemed equally fraught with life or death, and silently counted the seconds through two unchangeable hours.

By that time the doctor arrived. He was highly esteemed through the country and well-known at the Vicarage from former claims upon his skill. He likewise carried with him what is often the physician's best medicine—a hopeful countenance and a decisive manner which inspired confidence and cure where the doubting solemnity of a by-gone generation would have pronounced a sentence. He looked long and attentively at the Vicar without disturbing him by a touch, and then motioned the apothecary to the further end of the room where he talked earnestly for some minutes, turning his eye once or twice upon Crowley, who naturally, as a stranger in the house, felt diffident of interfering. In the end he was invited, with Lucy, to join in the consultation.

“Miss Longland,” said the doctor, “the case is apoplexy, as my friend here pronounced it, but be assured that it is not hopeless. The bleeding has, I trust, saved your uncle's life; and, in that case, you owe it in the first instance to the self-possession and prompt proceedings of this gentleman. Had a moment been lost, all aid would have been too late.”

Maiden reserve has no chill to oppose to the warm flood of gratitude, and the hand which was not ex-

tended to Crowley yesterday now clasped his unexpecting one with a fervour that made it hard to control his own. The doctor was not slow to perceive that he should leave his patient in keeping which was not likely to fail from want of harmony, to secure which he had some collateral motives not strictly medical. He had known Lucy from a child, and all her history, and in his drives from Lympton he had learnt something of Crowley from his groom, which in the course of consultation led to recommendations he might not otherwise have thought of.

“There are only one or two things,” he said, “which at all disturb my hopes of Mr. Bloomer’s recovery, and the first of these is the difficulty of providing in this neighbourhood the sort of society which I think most important for the restoration of his faculties. With all the tastes and acquirements of a gentleman, he has, for years, not had a gentleman near him, and the consequent stagnation of mind has no inlet for renewed circulation, which, in this case, is quite as much to be thought of as the circulation of the blood. The exchange of ideas and feelings to what he was always accustomed to would act as we have often seen a return to his native climate act upon a dying man by restoring him to health ; and, therefore, Mr. Crowley, I am sure you will pardon me for inquiring whether your stay in this part of the country is likely to afford a hope that you will sometimes look in upon him. It would indeed be a mercy if you could do so very often.”

"Certainly," replied Crowley, "as often as I am permitted. Nothing would make me so happy."

Lucy looked, she knew not how, but the doctor did.

"This," he continued, "is a great point gained; but there is still another in relation to nurses. I can approve of none that are not perfectly devoted to their task, and I know of no one in whom I can trust but Miss Longland. To Mrs. Bloomer I have a strong objection, which I hope she will forgive, on the ground of its being highly complimentary—the brilliant powers of conversation, which everybody knows to be unrestrainable, would be the death of him in five minutes, and we cannot afford to lose him, even with excess of pleasure; but as the communication may be painful, and the doctor may have the most authority, I will stay till she comes home, and make it myself."

As the lady had been a long time absent, Crowley thought she might return very soon, and that he had best not intrude himself upon a conference so confidential. With a strong opinion therefore of the doctor's great sagacity, he begged, and received permission, to renew his attentions as soon as the first shock might be over, and presently took his leave.

CHAPTER XI.

THE sudden illness of the Vicar was not known in the village till the time had arrived for evening service, when the unusual silence of the church bell caused inquiries that drew as large a congregation as had thirsted for absolution in the morning. The clerk now made the melancholy communication that all comfort for the rural sinners was postponed till he could not exactly say when, which indicated a period of much increased necessity. The spiritual deprivation was, we hope, becomingly regretted, but there were other considerations amongst the deprived which had doubtless some weight. Though few of the congregation were capable of perceiving Mr. Bloomer's incapacity for the office he filled, there was, as we have intimated, a very general appreciation of his worth, and the benevolent indulgence with which he had always tempered his pastoral advice. Reproach being no more feared from his scrutiny than thunder from a sunbeam, they looked upon him more as a sleeping partner in their errings and strayings than a stern creditor for reformation, and remembered

that when the old familiar face should no longer look upon them, there was no saying what sort of a face might succeed it.

And so the good people adjourned their devotions by twos and threes to the contemplation of the scene of this melancholy disaster, till one and all were assembled in front of the Vicarage. Just then arrived the good Christian and punctual attendant, Mr. Cheek, to be horrified more than all the rest, and no less astonished as to what could possibly have been the cause of a visitation so unforeseen. He was very soon to be informed, and to share his information with the public.

Making his way through the throng, after the manner of a billiard ball on a series of cannons which his friendly anxiety might render excusable, he hustled through the garden gate and pulled the house bell with the haste and authority of a gentleman at his own door, with a mad bull behind him. Mrs. Bloomer, who had been at home some time, flung up a window and answered him herself.

“ My goodness, gracious, mercy on me ! ” she cried at the top of her voice, “ who’s that making such an abominable noise at the door of a sick house ? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whoever you are ! ”

“ My good lady, it is me, Christopher Cheek. I have only just heard the lamentable——”

“ Go along about your business, and hear the rest from all the parish ! Get along and hear it is all your own doing, and learn to pay your tithes like an honest man, and not out of the gin bottle ! Ain’t you ashamed to be cheating a man out of receipts

for the last seven years when he doesn't know what he's about, and now to come here with your blustering make-believe to kill him outright?"

"But, my dear Mrs.——"

"Go along! I say, and cajole those who don't know you. You are known a great deal too well here, and we don't want any more of you!"

"But you mistake, I assure you. Poor dear Mr. Bloomer——"

"Get along with your assurance! Get along with your mistakes! Get along with your poor dear Mr. Bloomers! If you want to know any more, he is dying, and it's you that have killed him!"

And, with that, down came the window with the chop of a guillotine, as if the crime were expiated on the spot.

Mr. Cheek stood for an amazed moment, looking right and left for his senses, and was then about to step briskly homeward, as if he suddenly recollected where he had left them, when, to make matters worse, Crowley chanced to arrive again with a heavy load of condolence from Mrs. Toogood. Mrs. Bloomer saw him come down the garden walk, and up went the window a second time. The exclamations of welcome with which he was received formed so strong a contrast to the repulse of Mr. Cheek, that the juveniles at the gate, who had not forgotten old scores, and were in ecstasie at hearing Cheek "catch it" himself, set up a very loud and unfeeling shout of laughter. Again it burst forth, as Mrs. Bloomer ran down stairs and admitted her second visitor with her own hands, which slammed the door in the face

of her first. And again, as Mr. Cheek turned round to annihilate the offenders with his brace of visual revolvers, the shrill lungs gave another sample of their training in the crow-field, which made it rather difficult for him to maintain his dignity, and also to moderate the amount of his obligations to the Vicaress and her interloper, the latter of whom had really no particular claim to them, seeing that he was led into the parlour with no thought of anything but how to get out of it.

"Gracious me," exclaimed the gratified Mrs. Bloomer, "I hardly flattered myself that Mr. Crowley would compliment me with a visit so very soon; but the truth is you knew how very much your condolence would comfort me. Take a seat, my dear Mr. Crowley, and I'll sit close by you, and tell you all that has happened since you were here in the morning; only, if you please, we must speak in whispers, because they say there must not be a voice heard."

And with that she elevated the chin which we have before admired, and squeezed her eyelids together, as if she were taking aim at him down the line of her nose, at the same time edging her chair a little closer. It was a peculiarly bewitching way she had with her favourites; but Crowley edged a little further off, and endeavoured to make her less fascinating and more communicative, by asking if any change had taken place in the Vicar.

"Ah me! I'm sure I have not the smallest idea, for you will hardly believe that I am in future to depend upon you for that information, instead of

giving it. All I know is that Mr. Bloomer ought to have been contented with the blessings bestowed upon him, without taking to bad habits, which made him forget them ; for you have seen how very great a disparity there is between us, and have no idea what offers I rejected for his sake, and then to go and kill himself and lose the living, and leave me with nothing but the fortune I brought him, and a trifling settlement ! I declare if he goes off in this way it is a shame, and very unjust of him !”

And here she edged a little nearer, and Crowley a little farther.

“ I hope, Mrs. Bloomer, the illness will have a happier termination. But allow me to ask how it is that you are to depend upon me for the tidings of what transpires in your own house ?”

“ Ah, I don’t wonder you ask that, for the case is very uncommon.”

And the chairs gave two more little hops, like sparrows on a house-top.

“ You must know,” she resumed, “ that the doctor has peremptorily forbidden me to go near poor Mr. Bloomer, for fear, as he says, of my conversational powers, which he rates very far above their merits. He will allow nobody whatever to enter the room except Lucy, who, you know, has never much to say for herself, unless I can persuade *you* sometimes to sit with him. I’m afraid it is asking too much of you—oh me, I should think so. But then I am sure you will not mind straining a point to oblige *me*, who would do as much, and a great deal more, to oblige *you*.”

"By all means, Mrs. Bloomer," replied Crowley, holding his head as far back as he could, and retreating a few more inches towards the door, "I shall be most happy to do any service in my power, and, as Mrs. Toogood begged me to return immediately, perhaps I had better step upstairs at once."

And then looking at his watch in alarm at another hop after him, he jumped up in great astonishment that Mrs. Bloomer's powers of conversation had made him so far forget the time. The lady likewise jumped up to detain him, declaring with many protestations that he had not stayed a minute, and that their conversation had hardly begun. She had not half shown him the particular manner in which she hoped to be obliged, which was just to take a look in at the Vicar every morning, and then to assuage her great anxiety, and keep up her spirits for the rest of the day.

"You know, my dear Mr. Crowley," and here, in pugilistic phrase, she worked round him, and insinuated her attractions between his impatience and the doorway. "You know I have no one else to depend on for a sincere opinion, for the doctor will, of course, make the matter as bad as he can, and Lucy is always in the despairing mood, and quite incapable of forming any opinion if she were not. I can assure you she is by no means the sensible girl you may have imagined from your conversation on the railway, but only just able to repeat what she has read, or what people have told her, and has never made a single observation for herself in all her

life. Poor thing, when you have seen her for half an hour you have seen everything, and the doctor, I can see, prefers her attendance to mine on the Vicar, upon the same principle that would suggest a diet of bread pudding in preference to aliment of a more generous and seasoned nature."

"I have no doubt he is quite correct, and a feeling recollection of my infancy, before modern reformations, still overcomes me with the universal adjunct to bread pudding, which was boiled flounders. The very thought blanches me into a bloodless boiled flounder myself, and therefore it is high time I should take myself away and be served up."

"Oh, ha, ha! What a funny creature you are. But I can't laugh, for I am dreadfully unhappy, and shall be so impatient for your daily visit that—ah, me! don't step back, or you'll tumble over the stool—that—that—I really forgot what I was going to say, except that I look to you entirely to advise me what had better become of me in case anything should happen to Mr. Bloomer, for nothing could be more sad than to be left alone, just in the prime of my life, a poor, disconsolate—"

"Upon my life, Mrs. Bloomer," interrupted Crowley, stepping over the stool, in mortal terror of what was coming next in the way of provisional arrangements. "Upon my word I shall not be able to see Mr. Bloomer at all, unless you allow me to go at once, for I have not another moment to spare."

"Patience me, that's always the case with you gentlemen! You are always in such a breathless hurry. But if you must go, pray don't stay long,

and I'll wait for you at the foot of the stairs, and walk with you as far as Mrs. Toogood's, and then you can give me your advice, for you've no notion how exceedingly unhappy I am."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied Crowley, making a desperate effort at the handle of the door, and letting out half of himself.

"And pray, my dear Mr. Crowley, send Lucy down to me directly, for she'll only be in your way, and I've something very particular to tell her."

"Of course, of course!" and at last he succeeded in screwing out his other half.

He tapped very gently at the Vicar's door, and it was opened by Lucy, not pale as he had left her, but blushing with pleasure at his return.

"He is better," she whispered, with that taper little finger at her lips. "So much better, that all immediate danger has passed away. He must have been partly conscious before you left, for he has been looking about as if he missed you, and has tried to speak. Look, he is now in a quiet sleep."

He entered the room, and closed the door without a sound. The doctor had gone away during his interview with Mrs. Bloomer, and left him so fair a field for a more dangerous one, that, in this early stage of his acquaintance, he scarcely knew whether he might presume to stay; but Lucy was more aware of her obligations to him, and too sensible of her need for more, to give way to the natural confusion of a situation so unusual, and she did not forget that he came by authority. She seemed likewise to hesitate with something farther to say, and

etiquettes gave place, and so did Mrs. Bloomer's injunctions, whilst they seated themselves side by side, and were driven—as it were by fate—into a first confidential conversation.

In answer to his apology for so soon intruding again, and his plea of a commission from Mrs. Bloomer, she replied that he had waited for no commission to aid her in extremity, and that none could be required for looking on the good he had done. "That would be strange, Mr. Crowley; as strange—almost—as that I should owe so much to one whom I never saw till yesterday."

"Forgive me for reminding you that some yesterdays are divided from to-days by years."

"I do not need it: I will prove that I do not; for I am meditating a request which could only be excused on acquaintance of a much longer date. You have probably heard from Mrs. Toogood the almost friendless situation in which I am placed, and peculiar fates will perhaps plead for peculiar resources. I have thought and hesitated much within this hour, and have been forced to the conclusion that I know no one to whom I can appeal in this trying emergency. Mrs. Toogood—will you pardon me?—has the kindest—the only heart to which I can look for counsel, but—"

"But you know it is the last in the world to depend on."

"My aunt—"

"Your aunt—I, too, must speak in confidence—is out of the question."

"I have only one other friend—a very dear one——"

Crowley's heart beat quick. He felt he was coming to the grand mystery.

"But she is very young and inexperienced. Yes, only the dear girl you saw last night. You wonder to see me so helpless, and even she is scarcely less so, for neither of us has much hope at home, or much opportunity to seek resource in the other. And now, Mr. Crowley, look on my poor uncle, dependent upon *me*, as I have hitherto depended upon *him*. Would not this plead excuse for greater encroachment than even throwing my confidence on a stranger?"

Crowley needed some powers of restraint to keep his words within bounds, but though his language, unembarrassed by their two aunts, had a tone of interest very different from what it would have been in their presence, it was in no way different from what it might have been amongst intimate friends, and soon placed the frank and artless nature of Lucy at ease to take it up with the same forgetfulness of their newly-formed acquaintance.

"You encourage me to be explicit," she said. "I am told that though immediate danger is over, my uncle has been harassed and misled till his constitution is in danger of breaking down from other causes. That nothing can perfectly restore him but an entirely new mode of life, free from temptation and disquiet; by which the doctor explained that he meant a temporary separation from the peculiarities of my aunt and the habits of his present

society. In short, he said that, as soon as he can be moved, I must go away with him amongst friends of a different class. But other friends we have not. Go where we will, we must depend upon ourselves; and I feel that to risk him at his age, and with his infirmities, to the care of a mere girl like myself, who has never, but in the case which has made us——”

“*Friends*, Miss Longland, if I dare presume so far.”

“ Friends, then,” she resumed, with a faint smile, “who has never, except in this instance, seen the world beyond a mile from this village, would be almost a slighting of Providence. What I would ask of you, with this long preface, and I ask it thus early because I understand from Mr. Philpot that you have fixed to leave Broome Warren tomorrow.”

“Certainly I shall not. It was my intention, but I have changed it. My departure will depend upon the progress of Mr. Bloomer, and the satisfactory termination of the arrangements which cause your present uneasiness.”

“I am very poor in thanks, but I give you all I can. I thought that with your, no doubt, large acquaintance, you might know some clergyman’s family who would not be too proud to take in two such unfriended refugees.”

“Do you then already withdraw the title you have just given me? What need have you for clergymen’s families or any other when your own house is so near at hand, with my aunt, instead of

your own, for chaperone, your young friend, so dear to you, for companion, and myself for anything you please ? It has now, by the love of your good old nurse, and in spite of your faithless agent, been placed in perfect order, and will, in a very few days, be as fit to receive you as it was twenty years ago, and more likely to restore your uncle's faculties than any place in the world. Your mention of a clergyman reminds me that I have a friend who will undertake the duty here ; and Mrs. Toogood shall come to-morrow with a more formal invitation. Reserve your answer for that, for I must not ask it to mine ; and it is enough for the present that Mrs. Bloomer affords you no time to refuse it, for I hear her scolding somebody because I stay too long. Do not sadden yourself with a thought for the future, for you have now friends who will think for you."

The events of the last four and twenty hours had been too rapid and overpowering for poor Lucy's fortitude. She knew not what to say, and took leave of him in silence ; but, when the door closed, there was an eloquence from her eyes which would have been dangerous to a nature much more indifferent than that of her chance acquaintance.

Being in no great mood for Mrs. Bloomer's promised company in his walk back to the Rosary, it was rather a blessing that from the stair on which she had been keeping watch for him, she had perceived a strange drake gallanting the Aylesburys in her duck-pond, and had rushed off for vengeance upon Tom Dabchick, the miscreant who drew a

salary of sixpence a week to throw stones at all such interlopers and maintain decorum. It was a good opportunity to show how politely he kept his engagement; so, seeing the parlour-door open, he left his card upon the table and made his escape.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM this time Crowley's visits to the vicar were constant, and every day evinced an improvement. The old man partially recovered his speech, and became dreamily sensible of his obligations to the strange gentleman who took so much interest in his recovery; and his natural disposition to friendly feelings towards everybody, established a partiality not to be wondered at. The visit was always protracted till he dropped asleep; but the opportunities which would thus have been afforded for further confidential conversation with Lucy, were made quite unavailable by the jealous vigilance of Mrs. Bloomer, who was not slow in perceiving that attentions were attracted much more up-stairs than down. This was by no means in accordance with her first opinion of Crowley's good taste; and the invitation to Oakendell which Mrs. Toogood had duly repeated to Lucy and her uncle, to her (Mrs. Bloomer's) exclusion, upon which the doctor was peremptory, increased the discontent into that uncomfortable state of mind to which persons of her

own description might have given the name of Dumps. Under these visitations she was particularly inaccessible to reason: and accordingly, as soon as the medical attendants were out of the house, she made it a rule to feel that no nursing could compare with the tender assiduities of a wife, and to insist on making one of the party. There was no danger of her talking too much, for she was too angry to be charming, and her anger had no tangible excuse, Crowley's presence being only in obedience to her own request. But there she would sit as long as he stayed: incensed still more by the numerous indications of misconduct on the part of Jim Crow and his wives who were forming plebeian connections all over the village.

Crowley, whom we will not attempt to absolve from an occasional wish to consign his wrathful admirer to regions more remote, took such pains as he could not help to be well-bred and reasonably agreeable; but the self-denial of passing hours in Lucy's company, without daring to speak to her, was too much to be borne, and he came to the resolution of seeking a friend to whom he could at least speak about her. The pretty girl—the favourite companion of whom she had talked with so much affection—offered just the resource he wanted; and, as she had accepted the invitation to his house, there was the greater pretext for making her an intimate acquaintance. Miss Lightfoot, better known as Miss Polly, and best as pretty Polly, had called to thank Mrs. Toogood for offering her so pleasant a visit, and afforded him a fair beginning—more to be desired

from his observation that prettiness and liveliness were far from being her only characteristics. He therefore took an early occasion to saunter past her dwelling and thrive by her good offices.

As he did not succeed till after two or three days' failure, and was deterred from calling by distaste to the looks of Miss Pinhorn, we will fill up the time by giving some more particular account of these young ladies.

Miss Penelope Pinhorn—whom we mention with deference because she considered it her due—and pretty Polly Lightfoot, with whom we drop ceremony, because she usually dropped it herself, dwelt together in the trellised cottage we noticed some way back, where they were admitted to occupy the next position in that limited society to Mrs. Toogood. Miss Pinhorn thought herself entitled to the first, that young lady being the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn, Knight, who had been the mayor of the county town.

Sir Abram was of Hebrew extraction, and had passed his life in acts of benevolence towards Jew and Christian long previous to his title, as in all times subsequent to the creation of the world his tribe had done before him. So distinguished had they been that the afflicted in pocket had seldom been known to apply to any other resource, and grateful misery had absolutely claimed relationship with them, every member of whom, down to the Pinhorn in question, having been affectionately called “my uncle.”

Virtue is its own reward, and sometimes finds

very surprising ones. Mr. Pinhorn became opulent, and, to remove the only obstacle to universal respect, got baptized. On the next vacancy he was elected mayor, and, soon after, being called upon to head a deputation on the occasion of some royal event, went down upon his knee as Mr. Pinhorn, and jumped up as Sir Abraham.

Long previous to this great occurrence he had espoused the daughter of one of his own tribe, who bore him Miss Penelope; and, long subsequently, he had supplied her vacancy with the pretty daughter of one of his numerous nephews, who was said to have consented thereto in liquidation of a debt. He was thus very prosperous and very happy, and desired nothing but long life to enjoy his blessings. This he desired from pure Christian diffidence, and because the doctrines of his new faith; as expounded by the church he frequented, had caused some doubts in his mind as to whether he might be one of the elect. Whether he ever solved them to his satisfaction we are unable to say, though we know he was convinced at last, by a mode of reasoning not to be disputed. Sir Abraham died, leaving his young widow with no family but her step-daughter, and, contrary to all estimation of his wealth, small consolation but the superintendence of his monument.

After this affliction Lady Pinhorn found herself the farther consolation of a second husband in the person of a very eligible Captain Lightfoot, except that he had nothing but his commission; but neither of her marriages was fortunate, for the first

husband had lived a good many years, and the second died very soon. By the latter, however, she felt herself best provided for, though not in the way of interest, for she now had a daughter on her own account, and years enough in store to make her all she desired—all but well off, for at her death, which occurred early, pretty Polly's gifts of fortune amounted to just enough for independence, but nothing more.

We have said nothing of Miss Pen all these years, because we thought we should have enough of her hereafter, but as some discrepancies of character may raise a question of what could have made Polly consent to their living together, we must account for it, first, by the disposition of Polly, which could have loved and accommodated itself to almost anybody in need of her, and next by that early time of life which, like the creeping flower of the forest, may be diverted from its chosen course by any less pliant branch that obtrudes in its way. Miss Pen, we are to remember, was a dozen years older, and neither by nature nor education had she shown any proclivity to those unselfish feelings so natural to her sex that we hardly recognise it without them. She could talk of tenderness and affection by the hour, but then it was always the tenderness and affection which she expected for herself; her own demonstrations never went further than jealous upbraiding that she got so little, or pathetic discontent when other people got any at all. Too oppressed by her graces to do anything for herself, and too much afflicted by refinement to

be satisfied by anything that was done for her ; so delicate in health that no one could think of a comfort in her presence for fear of her more pressing need for it ; for ever under a sense of oppression, when the oppressor was her own querulous temper, yet always haughty as the last remains of Sir Abraham—the titled old clothesman of the Pinhorns. With all these unhappy traits she could, of course, expect no friend to admit her pretensions or sympathise with her grievances, and nobody at all to conform to her requirements, except the kind sister, whom she delighted to call by that name because it seemed to take a few years from her own age, and to warrant frequent allusion to the remarkable fact of one being so very fair and the other a dark brunette. It would, therefore, be a desecration of all human ties if Polly should think of leaving her for any other asylum.

Matters having been thus arranged, Mr. Cheek—who had been long before appointed to the agency of Broome Warren, and had dealt largely at Sir Abraham's emporium of unredeemed pledges for the furniture of farm-houses, and his own—took his usual care to be ready with another accommodation. On the death of Lady Pinhorn he chanced to have a cottage vacant, and persuaded the young ladies to make it their future home ; having a view, as was sometimes insinuated, of bettering his own condition by bettering his acquaintance with Miss Pen. No advance, however, had been made to this end, for the younger lady hated him, and the elder one,

he thought, would keep till he found there was no better chance of investing himself.

It is not very surprising that as one of this ill-assorted pair got older, and the other older still, their opposite qualities should become a little more developed, and that Polly should have her own opinions, and sometimes amuse herself by laughing at Miss Pen's. We make our first visit to them on a fine afternoon, when Crowley was taking his usual saunter past the window, and Polly was stationed thereat for something more entertaining than the tall, tawny complainer reclining in the background.

"Look, Pen," she exclaimed, "I declare there is Mr. Crowley! Oh, can't we call him in and ask how dear Lucy is to-day?"

"My dear Mary," replied Miss Pen in astonishment, "how can you think of such a thing! Do you forget that I am not acquainted with him, and never saw him except at church? And do you suppose that I can pass over the slight which he and Mrs. Toogood have put upon me by inviting you to Oakendell, to my marked exclusion?"

"Why, how could they invite you, Pen, when your dislike to poor Lucy, ever since she became my dearest friend, has been a thousand times more marked?"

"I think, Mary, it would have been more natural to consider your sister your dearest friend; and certainly more proper to decline an invitation from which she was excepted."

"I don't know what would have been most proper, but I know it would have been most un-

feeling to refuse what little aid I can give in cheering her under all these cruel troubles. But pray don't let us talk any more about it. Mr. Crowley has gone by, and here's somebody that will please you better. There's old Cheek passing the opposite way, and looking almost as black as he did when Mr. Crowley made him drive his pigs home."

"I don't think so at all. He has a great deal to think about, and I'm sure we have very much to thank him for."

"Yes, he's very obliging in providing us with everything we don't want, and taking his percentage."

"Mary, you really might spare such observations upon a friend who has been so attentive to us."

"To *you*, my dear. He knows better than to pay attentions to *me*. Has he not tempted poor old Mr. Bloomer to his filthy house every night to keep him in a chronic state of gin-and-water, and make him forget his tithes ? Has he not—"

"Mary ! such shocking calumnies !"

"Yet Lucy told me ; and she never spread a calumny in her life."

"Miss Longland, I suppose, is an angel."

"And if an angel is not to be believed, didn't Mrs. Bloomer proclaim it from her window last Sunday ? I'm sure *she* is no angel ; and don't you think it rather undignified to encourage the discarded friends of whatever else she may be ? Surely, dear Pen, with all your extreme delicacy you could never survive a proposal to become the lady of the quagmire at Green Lane's End."

"Mary, this is intolerable ! You are enough to discompose a saint!"

"I daresay it is, Pen, for it discomposes me, and I'm only a sinner."

"This is your usual injustice, Mary ; but I never meet with anything else—except ingratitude. Mr. Cheek would never presume to aspire to the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn ; and, if he did, sisters should always be the first consideration to each other. *My* idea is that they should have but one thought, one feeling, one object in life, one wish never to be separated for a moment, and I cannot conceal from myself that you are never happy out of the society of Miss Lucy Longland, as if your own home were irksome and disagreeable."

"Have but one object, Pen ? Then, of course, you have made up your mind never to marry ; and so it is of no consequence whether old Kit saw me laugh at him or not. But if he has no intention of presuming, I think you must admit that Neddy Fozzard has ; and Kit, bad as he is, is worth a dozen of him. Suppose I tell them both to keep their distance, because you are determined never to leave sister Polly ?"

"I will not hear you disparage Mr. Fozzard, Mary, because you do not understand him !"

"I understand him as well as any one else does, and know as much about him. Where does the creature come from ? Who is he ? What is he ? He says he is come for the seclusion and meditation indispensable for the completion of some great work ! What a treat we shall have when his lucubrations

come forth ! Ha, ha, ha ! The creature will be the death of me !”

Miss Pen’s fine eyes were elevated and rolling in contemptuous displeasure, and they rolled a little more from the conviction that she had no very ready answer, for Polly’s position was too strong for her. Her wits, indeed, were no match for Polly’s, which had been somewhat sharpened by the necessity for them since the advent of the gentleman in dispute, and perhaps a trifle more so by having lost the chance of hearing news of Lucy, to whom, we have before said, she had no access ; but they were never more than the pat of a kitten.

“ Well, well,” she resumed, “ don’t be angry, for here he comes to bless our evening walk, and I promise to be very charming. Where is our pretty page ? Here, Sprat ! Run and let in Mr. Edward Fozzard, and then saddle Edward the donkey. By the bye, I wish you had not given them the same name, for Sprat can never tell which is which—and I wish Mr. Fozzard would not always enquire for Miss Penny Lope, for fear they should, some day, give him a penny loaf.”

“ Ha, ha !” cried a prelude of bagpipes from a large flaky head, playing at bo-peep. “ I hear you ! I almost caught the joke ! Pray let us have it again, for I long for something to laugh at !”

“ Dear me,” replied Polly, “ I should have thought Mr. Fozzard could never want a subject as long as he lived ! Shall I say it again, Pen ? It will be such fun.”

“ Mary, you are always thinking of fun, which is

exceedingly unbecoming in young ladies! Where did you ever hear of such a thing as fun, as you call it, in the society to which we have been accustomed?"

"Nowhere, I grant. Perhaps though, if we heard a little more, it might heighten the effect of our elegance. What do you say, Mr. Fozzard?"

"Cha-à-arming!" buzzed the blue-bottle, "what a flow of spirits! What would I not give that my avocations did not weigh down my own! But see, my dear Miss Penny Lope, here's your Midas at the door."

"Oh, Mr. Fozzard, remember that is not the name you gave him! Not that anything deserves to be called after you; but you know his name is Edward."

"De-lightful! I am overwhelmed! I regard him as a brother," and the guttural melody made another gargle.

The ladies were already prepared for their excursion. Polly in a light cottage hat and jaunty jacket, as airy as herself, and Pen in an opera hat and ostrich feathers. A chair being placed by the side of her palfrey, she tenderly seated herself and opened an exquisite parasol; and Polly, having arranged the clouds of drapery, tripped along on one side, as chaperon, while Mr. Fozzard marched on the other as dangerous man, whilst Sprat and his cockade, with a kid leather whip, did the honour of Neddy's rear.

And so the procession advanced through the green glades and golden broom to the dead march of Mr.

Fozzard's bagpipe, which struck up before starting, with small likelihood of exhaustion before he returned.

It was not till the beauties of the sunset had blushed themselves beyond his patronage that the party found themselves a mile or two from home, and Miss Pen was beginning to meditate a return. But events of the greatest consequence will occur when we least look for them. She had no sooner essayed to prevail on Edward to point his ears homeward when he recognized a friend or sweetheart of his own species browsing in a bush by the way-side, and decidedly objected. He, moreover, set up a terrific shout of jubilation, which Polly afterwards declared she had mistaken for a sudden burst of laughter from his godfather. It rose and fell in rumbling roars and screams, till a check of the bridle turned the advance into a rear-up, and then Edward walked upon his hind legs and pawed the air—as unmanageable a jackass as ever defied a costermonger. Miss Pen shrieked and would have fainted, if such a measure had not involved an indecorous tumble over his tail; Polly shrieked too, but we are afraid it was not a shriek of alarm; and Sprat applied his whip with the vigour of a giant; but Neddy was determined to have a word with his friend, and became more and more uproarious. Mr. Fozzard, who had at first wheeled about in a panic, had presently recourse to his great reasoning powers. If he approached in front, his godson might box his ears with his hoofs, but if he rushed in from the rear it was possible that Edward, being on his

hind legs, would not kick. To the rear therefore he rushed, and, seizing Miss Pen round her elegant waist (we are obliged to admit it), dragged her from her perilous position ; and, dropping distractedly on one knee, supported her disordered graces on the other. Sprat—irreverent little varlet that he was—thought the scene so wonderfully like the end of a tournament, which he had lately witnessed at the beer-shop, that he took no notice of the farther proceedings of Neddy or Polly either. Polly was the only one in possession of her senses, and so, snatching the whip from his hands and seizing the reins, she not only whirled the rebel round about, but (amazing instance of rashness !) sprang upon his back, and made such an improvement upon Sprat's admonitions as persuaded him at once into common sense and uncommon speed. Miss Pen, feeling herself very comfortable, dropped her head upon Mr. Fozzard's shoulder and fainted. Whereupon, Sprat, fearing she would never "come to time," turned round to consult Polly and the donkey ; and, finding they had both run away, ran away himself to fetch the doctor.

Was it a runaway ? Well, Sprat said so ; but, no doubt, Miss Polly had been suffering long enough under the weight of Mr. Fozzard's genius to be rather tired, and anxious to get home. Besides, nobody had attended to her, or said a word to her, and if she had occasionally dropped back a hundred yards or so—chaperon as she was—nobody seemed to miss her. Indeed, she had rather believed they would be glad to get rid of her, if it were not for the

proprieties, on which subject she entertained opinions of her own. Edward's interesting rencontre had given her fair occasion to assert them, and the reader can take which view he pleases. For ourselves, we confess we can hardly make up our minds. If Neddy was really running away, we cannot think the cracking of the whip was the most likely mode of stopping him ; and, again, if Polly was borne off against her will, it is not usual for young ladies in such predicaments to express their terror in fits of laughter. All we can say is that she arrived safely in the village, where she almost galloped over Mr. Crowley.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE manner of their meeting was too amusing to be ceremonious ; and, as she jumped off and flung the rein over the garden railing, they shook hands with a mutual disposition to laugh.

“ I am afraid, Miss Lightfoot, that high-spirited animal has run away with you ? ”

Polly could not tell which had run away with the other. She had not tried to stop him, and their motives for getting home were about equal. “ The truth is, Mr. Crowley, I saw you pass our window some time ago without being able to beg a few words about dear Lucy, and as I left our party pretty well engaged I thought I might steal away and intercept you on your way home. I have learnt some matters which she cannot know too soon, and have no means of conveying them unless you will help me.”

There was something earnest in her look which startled him. Perhaps the man of the platform was at his post again, for he was seldom absent.

“ As I have a good deal to say,” she resumed, “ and should not like to be interrupted, I had better

not ask you in. We can take advantage of our garden door into the forest, where I can put you on a short way home."

They said little more till they had emerged amongst the green twilit pathways, and she had looked around to be sure they were hidden from view. She then, without losing time in further preface, began her communication.

"Last Sunday night," she said, "when there was little hope that Mr. Bloomer would survive till the morning, my extreme anxiety led me out upon the green in front of the Vicarage, in the hope of seeing some indication at the windows of what was passing within, or of finding some one who could give me information. There was no one to be met with—not a soul in the village stirring. It was cloudy and very dark, and, as I could see nothing, I approached nearer to listen. To my surprise, I almost put my hand upon another person engaged in the same watch. This turned out to be a girl of the village, who had been for some time engaged as servant to Mr. Cheek. She was one of the many who had often been rescued by Lucy's hand from the want and starvation so common in this wretched place, and was seeking hopelessly for an opportunity of seeing her, to disclose some proceedings of Cheek's, which appeared to concern her deeply. Knowing us to be inseparable friends, and thinking I might see her the soonest, she disclosed them to me."

Polly then gave a minute account of all that had transpired at Cheek's house on the Saturday night,

as far as her informant had been able to observe. Of Aaron's arrival, and the consternation it created; of the Vicar's visit, and his conveyance home, with Nelly's unexpected attendance; and the singular conversation between Aaron and Lucy, who seemed to be known to each other, though their words were not distinguishable except at the conclusion, when Aaron asserted that some person was a great villain.

"Who was he?" asked Crowley.

"She did not hear."

"Where is Aaron?"

"Gone, no one knows where. He went away on Sunday morning, supplied with clothes and money by Cheek, who has ever since been in great apprehension of something which is equally in mystery. My fears are that, as her father's agent, Cheek may have involved her in some sort of peril, from which she requires immediate advice to extricate herself. But this is by no means the most important part of my story. Some clue to its meaning may possibly be found in what I have still to say, though I have not been able to connect it. Last night I walked towards the Vicarage again, and again met the girl I spoke of. She had now another strange tale. In the course of the day a gentleman, who said he had come down from London in consequence of having seen the Vicar's sudden illness in the county paper, called upon Cheek as the agent of the property, to ascertain the particulars. Nelly had learnt thus much at the desire of her master, who never chooses to see people till he has heard their business, and described him as about three or four and thirty

years old, dressed something like the fashionable horse-dealers who come down to this part of the country to make purchases at the annual fairs—very talkative, and remarkably free in his manner."

"Did Cheek admit him?"

"He would not be denied. Her master did not know him, but scrutinized him with his fixed look of suspicion that nobody can visit him with good intentions. 'You don't seem to recollect me, Mr. Cheek,' he began, 'but we shall be friends presently, if you'll only let that girl raise the window, and leave the door open, for I've a particular objection to the smell of gin.' Mr. Cheek, finding himself treated with so little ceremony, seemed to think it might be an occasion for adopting rather more himself, and the stranger was indulged.

"The door being left unclosed, and Nelly, thinking herself bound by what she had heard in the Vicarage garden, to hear anything more that might concern Lucy, the kitchen door was unclosed likewise."

As Nelly's relation, with the account of what Polly afterwards witnessed for herself, was long and minutely graphic, we must endeavour to condense them in our own language.

"Well, Mr. Cheek," resumed the visitor, "and so you don't know me? My name is Captain Cox."

Nelly heard a motion of Cheek's chair, as if he started.

"Quite enough," he replied. "Quite enough, Captain Cox. There's no necessity to say more; I recollect all about you."

"I shouldn't wonder. It is a long time ago, but

you are not likely to forget Uncle Downton, for he served Sir Harry rather a bad turn, though luck served me a pretty good one, by giving him no time to make a will."

"Yes, yes, I know all about it. You became heir-at-law and a rich man. There was a great deal of affliction amongst us in those days, and I make it a rule never to talk about them."

"You are quite right, Cheek, for those we don't want back again are best forgotten. Well, I had something to do hereabouts, and hastened my journey to hear whether old Bloomer is dead."

Cheek was again surprised. What could Captain Cox know about Mr. Bloomer?

"Why, no," he replied, "the old man is not dead, and is likely, from what I hear, to last some time longer. But I was not aware that you knew him."

"Ah, very likely. I was not aware of it myself, for I have not had much to do with folks of that calling since I was baptized; but in this instance I really feel a concern, for I am told his life is of great consequence to Sir Harry's daughter."

Cheek compressed his little black eyes with another look of scrutiny.

"I was equally unaware," he answered, "that you were acquainted with Miss Longland."

"Indeed! What, she never told you?"

Crowley was electrified.

"Never told him!"

"How could she," replied Polly, "when the information would have been false? Is it likely that

Lucy should have an acquaintance of this description?"

"Very unlikely—very—but—" and his thoughts rushed back to the platform.

"If Lucy had known such a creature, do you suppose I should have been in ignorance of it?"

"But if the assertion was false, how certain the detection."

"Not perhaps under present circumstances, till some pressing purpose is answered; and what that may be is our object to discover." Captain Cox then talked about his great pleasure in introducing himself to Mr. Cheek, of whom he had formerly heard a great deal from his late uncle, and had a way of fixing his eye, which seemed to be as little agreeable as the conversation from which Cheek had excused himself. He was so pertinacious in this, under the appearance of carelessness, that one would have thought he did it on purpose, till Cheek became impatient, and recalled him rather shortly to business.

"I see, Captain Cox, you are sounding the channel to something else which you have not mentioned. But there's no need to lose time. It is all very well for folks of fashion to study modes of approach, but men in my line don't need them. We can't afford to be delicate. The jockey on your breast-pin will tell you that one man will win the race whilst another is gathering up his reins."

"Very true, Cheek; you are just what I was told I should find you, as sharp as a terrier, and as rough as a badger. We are both men of the world. You

know well enough that though you are, no doubt, an excellent fellow, I should have been very unlikely to bother my head about your acquaintance if I did not want to make use of it, and *I* know, quite as well, that you would not bother yours about salvation, if we made it worth your while to jog the other road. Now, you see, we understand one another, so here's the proposal I have come all this way to make."

Cheek here found the conversation was getting too interesting to be carried on with open doors, and rose up to close them. Nelly heard no more for the next half hour, when Captain Cox was going away. She then saw they had established a great friendship, and heard her master receive an invitation to dine at the Longland Arms this day. "And there they are," said Polly, concluding her narrative, "in all probability plotting mischief at this moment."

So strange a story was naturally followed by much conversation, which made the time pass unobserved, and it was now dark. They had strolled along the road till they found themselves at the turning of the private one to Mrs. Toogood's lodge. They here thought they must go no farther, and seated themselves amongst the broome upon the bank; but before they had time for much consultation, the moon suddenly broke out, and, in the same instant they heard voices, and the step of a horse.

The men were leisurely approaching, and were presently in sight, one of them leading the horse. They were talking earnestly, but the horseman spoke in a heedless manner, as if the subject were

unimportant, or his caution something the worse for their cheer at the public house. It was soon beyond a doubt that they were the persons who had so closely occupied them.

“Do moderate your voice,” said Cheek, “there’s no knowing what this long broome may hold. It is just the time when all the village is out sweet-heating or poaching, or both together; and nobody has such ready ears as those who are afraid of being caught.”

“What, you know that from experience, do you, Cheek? Well, there’s no disputing such good authority; and as we’ve got to the place where the road branches off I must mount and make play for the train.”

“Plenty of time,” replied Cheek, “we must stop a bit before we part, because we have not done yet about this sum that should be paid down.”

“What signifies? I don’t carry thousands in my pocket, and cannot write cheques without pen and ink. You have my word, and ain’t that as good as my bond?”

Cheek made no answer, which seemed to imply a doubt, and after a moment observed,

“This is a hazardous affair. If we succeed, well and good. But if we don’t? You say you saw her in London?”

“I might have seen her a hundred times; but she was afraid of that aunt, and there was no dodging her.”

Crowley was springing to his feet; but Polly caught him by the arm.

The negotiators heard nothing, and proceeded; Cox averring that there was no difficulty at all on the part of Lucy, "for when I heard her aunt was coming up to town—"

"Who told you that?" demanded Cheek.

"Oh! I've friends hereabouts; when I heard that I wrote to her, and up she came; quite pretty enough to convince me that since I happen to possess her father's fortune I couldn't do a pleasanter thing than invite her to share it."

"Um! that was your motive for writing, was it?"

Cheek was evidently suspicious of some other, but did not think fit to reject the one given.

"And how," he inquired, "did the project answer?"

"How? Why, it would have answered well enough; only there was no time. She knows what she's about, and so you'd have said if you had seen her cut me when I went to see her off by the train. She had no fancy for betraying our acquaintance to her aunt, and that's not a bad sign."

Little pride would Lucy have felt in the thrill which these communications shot through the heart she had so suddenly enthralled. The facts recalled by a part of them seemed to vouch undeniably for all that was insinuated; but Crowley still compelled himself to listen whilst it was possible to have more proof.

Cheek continued to make further demurs about his risk, but the Captain, though the fumes of the Longland Arms were not quite dispersed, was sober enough to argue his case.

"Why, now, Cheek," he expostulated, "I cannot, for the life of me, see what risk you run. You have been Sir Harry's man of confidence, and have known her from childhood. As a matter of course, your influence must be considerable. Use it for my advantage, and there's your price. Remember this is for the girl as she stands—no advantages, no engagements, as we say—no stake that she is pretty sure of winning. If the estate had been entailed that's another matter; or if there had been any other property in prospect. But you say there is none?"

The question was asked rather significantly, and answered somewhat in the same tone.

"None; you never heard of any, did you? But who told you the estate was not entailed, and gave you so many particulars which I thought were only known to myself?"

Cox made no reply; perhaps because the village clock at that moment struck ten, and reminded him of his train. He turned to tighten his horse's girths, and only muttered a few maledictions at its wincing, with his head under the saddle flap. Meanwhile the light fell upon Cheek's face so as to show the entire expression, in the complicated characters of which his ally might have read anything but the assurance of amity or good faith. He might also have seen a slight indication of disquietude in the assumed carelessness of the repeated inquiry as to what could have made him think of other property.

"Surely it is known well enough that she never can have any."

“Property?—Stand, you fidgety brute!” ejaculated the Captain, dividing his attention with the girth strap between his teeth. “Oh! I don’t know. In old families, like this of the Longlands, there’s often property turning up of some sort or other, the rummaging of old chests and odd corners; and Sir Harry, I have heard, was a careless sort of fellow who would rather lose things than take the trouble to put them away. That’s all,” and, having completed his horse’s toilet, he turned round upon a countenance which was immediately the picture of sincerity.

“Well, Cheek, and so there’s no more chance, eh? never mind. I was only thinking that if there were no prospects your friendship for the family would have made you more ready to assist her to a rich marriage, even without a retaining fee. Only that—but I’ve no time to say more; for here’s not half an hour to do four miles over roads that are rough enough for a steeple chase. Write to me as soon as you have anything to say.”

“Yes; but you have not told me where.”

Crowley listened eagerly.

“I forgot that; and I cannot exactly say. This is a busy time, and I’ve a round of races to attend. But as soon as I know where I am, I’ll let you know, and so good-night.”

With these words, he vaulted into the saddle and disappeared at a sharp canter. Cheek watched him, with a return of that lowering sneer till he was out of sight, and then slowly melted in the misty moonlight.

Crowley and Polly turned to each other to compare notes of astonishment.

He was unable to express a thought, so utterly was he confounded by the confirmation of all his suspicions, and Polly was beginning to doubt whether she had done quite the service she intended.

"Do not," she insisted. "Do not judge dear Lucy so hastily. When you know her as I do you will stake your life she can do nothing inconsiderate. She stands more in need of aid than exposed to blame. We know not all the trials she is under. No one knows but herself and this atrocious Cheek, whose long and determined silence about her father would make the letter from Captain Cox irresistible. Remember, we heard him say he was nephew and heir to all the robberies of Downton, and whom would she think so likely to relieve her from her years of suffering?"

The word of reason was spoken in good time, for it came when Crowley's stock was quite exhausted; but he made a strong effort to regain it.

"I think," he replied, "that these scoundrels have each some end disguised from the other, and that, with the aid of that man whom you before mentioned, and with some explanation from Miss Longland, strange things may be brought to light, and both of them to good account. One is not likely to commit himself to the extortions of his fellow rogue without stronger motives than he gives, and the other is as little likely to have been confused at the

allusion to family papers if none had existed. It remains to be seen whether she *will* explain. She has said nothing of these matters to *you*."

The fact was not to be denied or accounted for; and a long and painful conversation ensued, but ended in no present plan of proceeding, except to keep their confidence a secret, and, in Lucy's present state of trial, as much from her as from others. She would very soon be safe at Oakendell, where perhaps she might be more communicative and help them to deliberate with more composure.

It was then time to separate, which they did, as Miss Pen might have said, like two guilty creatures who had set at naught the whole world of proprieties.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUT what had become of Miss Pen and her own proprieties all this time? We are concerned to remember that we left her in a questionable fainting-fit on Mr. Fozzard's knee, and that Sprat, unmindful of decorum, had deserted them in search of the doctor. Having had much practice in running, incidental to his foragings amongst the apple-orchards, he was in excellent wind, and reached the village almost as soon as Polly at full speed. On the way he met sundry other boys, who had gone through the same system of training and could run like hares, and shouted the flying intelligence that it was "all up with missis!" Then he alarmed all the villagers who chanced to be gossiping at their cottage-doors, and finally he found Doctor Choke, who could follow the scent of a good case with the speed of a fox-hound. After that, Mr. Sprat thought it was time to indulge himself with a ride, so catching Neddy from the railing to which Polly had attached him, he jumped upon his tail, and galloped off to command the regiment he had raised.

Miss Pen's fainting-fit had been alarmingly pro-

tracted ; and, when she came to herself, it had not occurred to her to change her position, but what the conversation had been, must remain a mystery ; for, as the reader knows, our attention was engaged elsewhere. All we can repeat was a tremulous exclamation of "Oh, Edward ! Edward !"

We are convinced these exclamations must have been intended for the other Edward, and not for Mr. Fozzard ; but we cannot pretend to say how they were interpreted by the light company of Sprat's Own, who, unperceived in the twilight, and favoured by the overpowering feelings of the principal personages, were standing at ease within four or five yards of them. Certain it is that when Mr. Fozzard's eyes, in their fine frenzy rolling, happened to roll upon this light company, they seemed to roll out of his head, and Mr. Fozzard himself to shoot up from a powder-mill ; whilst Miss Pen, propelled by the same convulsion, made an aërial excursion, from which she lighted on the ground, like Iris on a special message from Olympus.

The situation was peculiar and rather perplexing. We cannot ask any of our fair readers what they would have done, because it is out of the question to conceive them in such a one ; and we are equally at a loss to know what we should have done ourselves, because we never happened to be so surprised. Upon the whole, we are inclined to believe that Miss Pen and her philosopher adopted a line of tactics as good as any other. Dropping the dignity with which she had been used to look down upon such little, disorderly fragments of humanity which

remained after the manufacture of persons like herself, she smiled with delightful indulgence :

“ Ah, Jerry Hodges, my good boy, is that you ?”
“ E’es.”

“ And I declare there’s Jacky Rokins and Tommy Dabchick ! I’m so glad you have been good and have got a holiday !”

“ We ain’t got one.”

“ Oh, never mind ; I won’t tell ! I never tell tales, and I hope nobody does, for it is very bad to tell tales. There’s something for you all to go and buy marbles. But don’t say who gave it to you, or good Mr. Cheek will think I spoil you.”

“ Noa, we wunt ; ’cause he’d be like enough to take it away from us.”

“ Oh, dear ! That would be a pity ! So take care, my dears, you don’t say you have seen me !”

“ Noa ; nor he, neither. Come along, Jerry ! Come you Tom Dabchick ! Whoop ! Give us a back ! Whoo-hoo !” And away they went, with a series of vaults over each other’s heads, to tell the whole parish.

Mr. Fozzard’s comportment was different. His philosophy never having been exercised on such a case as his own very unforeseen one, he walked in upright solemnity, considering what was the most proper thing to be done, and whether the “ Penny Magazine ” had ever treated of the article ‘ Boy,’ and how he could be made to hold his tongue. Perhaps the best way might be to give him sixpence ; but, as Miss Penny Lope had forestalled him, it was of no use to give it over again ; and so he gazed on the rising stars and was deep in astronomy.

As they moved on they met other detachments of Sprat's Own ; then the regimental surgeon and his volunteer assistants ; then our own special reporters ; and finally the commanding-officer on his blown charger, who, finding that his utmost speed caused no relaxation of whacks and kicks, very naturally decided upon trying what reward he should get for standing still.

It was a lengthy gauntlet to run, but Miss Pen went through it with exquisite feeling, having a charming recognition for every one, and holding up her train with the points of her thumb and finger so gracefully, that one might have thought her broad, romantic hat to have been crushed into a butter-boat on purpose. The apprehensions that had brought out so many kind friends, and their congratulations on her narrow escape, were so gratifying, that she expressed herself very glad the accident had occurred. Of course Mr. Fozzard's admirable presence of mind and undaunted intrepidity came in for its high tribute of applause, so that he too was congratulated, and he too expressed his pleasure at such flattering attentions. The public, however, seemed rather disappointed that the event had not been of greater consequence, for events at Broome Warren were of rare occurrence. Nevertheless, as there was no occasion for tears, they made themselves what amends they could with demonstrations more lively ; and even Dr. Choke, the most aggrieved of all, smiled as well as could be expected. At last Miss Pen was restored to the back of rebellious

Edward, and re-entered the village under the escort of all its inhabitants.

Poor Polly, when alone with Pen, was destined to find the suavity bestowed on Jerry Hodges and the rest, by no means extended to her.

“ Mary, you have ruined me ! made me the scandal of the whole village, and driven me to a step which you know I never contemplated, but which is now indispensable !”

“ Dear Pen, I’m very sorry to hear it.”

“ You know I never had a thought of Mr. Fozzard. You know my intense feeling that sisters should never be separated. You deserted me under the most cruel and trying circumstances ! Left me insensible on a gentleman’s knee in the midst of a drove of dirty boys, and ruined my reputation ! Have I not, all my life, been teaching you what is due to our dignity ? And have I deserved to be undone for all my pains, for all my affection, for all my determination to live a single life that you might never want protection, solace, companionship, and all the delights which sisters were born to afford each other ?”

And here Miss Pen burst into a passion of tears, which had well-nigh set the astonished Polly off into a peal of laughter.

“ My dearest Pen ! how could I know that your dignity would oblige you to sit upon Neddy Fozzard’s knee ? How could I divine that Edward the First would place you in such a position, or that Edward the Second would set his godfather such a bad example ? And how could I tell whether you would

not reproach me for impropriety if I stayed to witness such confidential proceedings ? If I was wrong, in going away, how was I to conceive you would think it right to let Sprat go away too ? After all, I can't see what great harm has been done. You met with a fright, and people will say so, and there's an end of it. If you don't like Mr. Fozzard, and feel a delicacy in telling him so, only tell it to *me*, who happen to be born with so little of that delicacy, and joy betide him !”

“ Mary, you know him to be immeasurably above all other men !”

“ Well, then, no harm has been done. You couldn't hope to marry a better man than the best ; and, as for me, you may be sure I shall never complain of your breaking through your maxim about sisters ; for I think they ought to consider each other's happiness quite irrespectively of all selfish considerations. Therefore it appears to me that all you find fault with has been very fortunate, since it has brought matters to a crisis.”

“ I never heard a speech so unnatural ! It is plain you want to get rid of me ! But remember, Mary, if I am unhappy—if my heart is broken—it is all your doing ! The wisest people have laid it down that marriage is a lottery.”

“ Yes, but you have drawn a great prize, you know ; and surely you ought not to be angry with me for giving the wheel such a lucky turn. I think you ought to be very much pleased with me, and with Sprat, too—especially Sprat—for he it is that has removed the last obstacle to the *éclaircissement*,

and brought the folks to congratulate you. I shouldn't wonder if he were just now gone to set the bells ringing."

"Ah, the little wretch!" Miss Pen sprang up from her seat as suddenly as she had bounced from Edward's knee, and pulled down the bell-rope. Sprat bolted in as if the tug had been at his ear.

"Sprat, you imp! How dare you see my face?"

"Please, mum, I come a-cause the bell rung."

"What made you run away from me to-night, sir? Tell me that!"

"Please, mum, I thought as how you was a-dying."

"And what made you come back again? What made you come back, I say?"

"Please, mum, I come with Doctor Choke."

Sprat betrayed his intelligence by a slight wink; and as Miss Pen saw that he understood her, she became more exasperated than before.

"What are you making faces at, sir? How dare you, sir! Go along, sir, and see if all those people are still at the door!"

"Yes, mum; they're all there, and ever so many more, a-hearing of you blowing me up!" And off went Sprat in loud affliction to make them hear the better. "It wasn't no fault of mine, mum. I never knows what to do, a-cause when I does my best it allays turns out for the wurst. Whoo, hoo! You never told me as you was a-going to be busy, and didn't want me. Whoo, hoo, hoo!"

There was something so amusing in Pen's betrayal

of her real cause of wrath that Polly could not refrain from laughing almost as loud as Sprat lamented, but she exerted herself to keep the peace.

“Never mind, Pen, never mind ! If proposals were interrupted, there will be plenty more opportunities. Only give Neddy an additional feed of corn, and he’ll kick you off again to-morrow ; but there’s no need to explain the case to all the people at the window.”

“ Didn’t I tell you to go and send them away, you detestable brat ? Do you not hear me ? What are you staring at ? Why don’t you go ?”

“ Please, mum, if they wants to know how you find yourself, what am I to say ?”

“ Stupid boy ! Tell them to go about their business. Lock the door and go along to bed, and don’t let me hear another word.”

“ No, mum ; good night, mum.” And so he composed a message, that “ Missis was no how at all ;” and went to bed expressing his deep concern by whistling, “ Hey for Bob and Joan.”

“ Hear him, Mary ! Hear him ! There’s the sort respect you bring down upon me ! If I don’t go out of my senses I shall doubt if I ever had any !” With which Pen seized a candle and flounced out of the room.

“ Poor Pen !” said Polly to herself, “ I fear other people may doubt that too.” And she took another candle to follow her ; but just as she laid her hand upon the door, with the front window close at her side, she was arrested by a very low tap ; and, looking hastily round, perceived a pair of eyes

looking in ; for the troubles of Mr. Sprat had caused him to forget the shutters. Looking closer, she distinguished a female face, and presently she made out the good-looking features of Nelly. Being assured that something of importance had brought her, she placed her finger on her lips to enjoin silence ; and, stepping on tip-toe to the front door, very cautiously unlocked it, and let her in.

"Nelly," she said, "speak low ; we must not be heard up stairs. You have brought me more news."

"You told me last night, ma'am, that you were going to Oakendell, and I did not know whether I might have another chance of seeing you ; so as Mr. Cheek is safe, I thought I would just try to tell you something—I don't know whether you will think much of it ; but as people are talking about Mr. Fozzard coming here so often, you may perhaps like to hear it."

"Certainly, Nelly ; anything about Mr. Fozzard, and the worse the better!"

"Well, ma'am, Mr. Cheek was a little uneasy before he went to bed to know who told Captain Cox so much about Miss Longland and the family property, and asked me, as if his head was full of it, whether I had ever seen that fellow Cox in the village before. I told him I had, once or twice, and he then looked more put out, and was very anxious to know where he had been."

"Did you know ?"

"No, ma'am ; and he desired me to be quick and find out. I told him he had better find out for himself, for I had no mind to be asking about such

gentlemen, and he seemed to have no mind himself. We had an altercation about it, as we have about a good many things, and I could see he was afraid to be heard making enquiries. He wanted me to pick up the information as if I was not looking for it, and made it of no consequence. But it was plain that *he* did—and great consequence."

"You mentioned Mr. Fozzard. Had he any suspicion of *him*?"

"No, ma'am; but *I* had. He spoke of him amongst a good many others who might know something, and then he doubted, and said Mr. Fozzard wouldn't do, for he was a stranger to the place, and Cox's friend must be some old inhabitant."

"And what made you think differently?"

"Because I know that Mr. Fozzard has been making acquaintance all round about, ever since he has been here, which Mr. Cheek might have heard for himself, if anybody had cared to tell him. He is great friends with all the tenants, and asks all sorts of questions about Mr. Cheek and his treatment of them, and everybody thinks he must have some particular reason."

"Then he is doing it for some underhand purpose, for he has kept it a profound secret from us! But what makes you suppose he is employed for Captain Cox?"

"I suspected it from what I heard in the parlour yesterday; but, as he is so great a friend here, I did not say so. I thought I had better make sure before I told you; and sure enough I am now—I am acquainted with the girl who waits upon the company

at the Longland Arms, and am just come from her to let you know what I have heard, and ask what I shall do."

"Go on, my good Nelly; this may be of immense consequence! What did she say?"

"She said, ma'am, that the first thing Captain Cox did, when he arrived yesterday morning, was to send for Mr. Fozzard, who came immediately, and stayed with him for more than two hours; and it was certainly on particular business; because, when they rang for something, the table was covered with papers. She saw Captain Cox roll them up carefully and put them in his pocket, and heard him say it was all very satisfactory, and that he had now made up his mind. They then parted, and he asked her the way to Mr. Cheek's.

Polly's surprise was great, and her eyes sparkled with some bright anticipation.

"Nelly, my dear Nelly, have you time to run up to the Rosary and tell this to Mr. Crowley; for he is going away to-morrow morning?"

"It would not be safe, ma'am. Mr. Cheek knows I am out on his errand, and is very likely to get up and be looking for me."

"Then we must decide for ourselves. What would Cheek do if he knew that Fozzard was Cox's spy?"

"Make him remember it! He never forgives, and I don't believe he'd stick at anything."

"So much the better. And what would become of Cox?"

"Whatever he's about would be blown to the

sky. For, if Mr. Fozzard wouldn't tell, the farmers must, or else be turned out."

"And Miss Longland and Miss Pinhorn would be rescued from all three of them at once. We cannot leave the work in better hands than Cheek's: let him have the benefit of the fact, and Neddy Fozzard the consequences. We cannot be wrong. Run home and tell him every word. Make the story as bad as you can. If he is frightened, frighten him worse; and be sure you shall never want friends. Come to me before I leave, which will not be for three or four days; and, in the meantime——"

The speech was cut short by a whistle and a scream! Mr. Sprat had been too much excited to sleep very soundly, and was again practising "Bob and Joan," which again drew down Miss Pen's enthusiastic applause. Nelly was out of the house in a moment, and Polly fastened the door and shut the shutters, and stole away to her room.

CHAPTER XV.

IT will not be supposed that Crowley, on his return to the Rosary, made any disclosure of the particulars he had obtained from Polly Lightfoot, as that would have been a general publication of them. He knew besides that, however desirable it was for his aunt to dispense with the respectful co-operations of Mr. Cheek, and however agreeable it might be to himself to make the communication, her patronage, wherever bestowed, was unassailable. He had never spoken of it, though he had seen its expediency from the first day, for he had not much doubt that he could very soon place her favoured man of business in a position to settle his own. Their tea-table discussion was therefore directed to the great necessity for moving Mr. Bloomer with the least delay possible, in which Mrs. Toogood perfectly agreed, as her visit to the vicarage, when she gave the invitation to Oakendell, was received by Mrs. Bloomer in a manner by no means recom-mendatory of her fitness for the charge of an invalid. She was quite ready to fulfil her engagement the

moment the house was ready, and undertook to prepare Lucy and Polly, and account for her nephew's departure from Broome Warren rather sooner than he expected.

There was another cause for her readiness to commit him to his own protection, and this was in reference to Mr. Thomas Philpot, who had been long ago forbidden the vicarage for the sin of carrying Lucy's comforts to the poor, and declining to convey the scoldings of Mrs. Bloomer. The removal to Oakendell would restore that excellent young man to the occupation in which he took so much delight; and, at the same time, enable Lucy to bestow upon him the reward which dear James's liberality had placed in her power.

"Don't you agree with me, dear James?"

"Entirely, my dear aunt. I have been very remiss in not having yet called upon Mr. Philpot, and shall make a point of taking him in my way to-morrow."

When the next day arrived, and breakfast and good advice were disposed of, he took his leave, and set out to perform his promise.

The name of Tom Philpot's mansion was Huntsmore Lodge, which had probably been more suited to it in days gone by than it was at the period of which we are writing. Tom had long been doing his best to drop it, but nothing sticks so tenaciously as a name, whether too good or too bad, and Huntsmore Lodge it will be as long as a brick stands. His forefathers, for a good many generations, had been what is called "well-to-do" in the world. They

had possessed a good quantity of land, but had occupied a rather anomalous position in it, never having reached that of the old county families, except upon sufferance, though by no means descending to the subordinate one of ordinary farmers. They were highly respectable, hospitable and jovial, and always popular, in virtue of a capital pack of harriers, which gave them a hand and glove acquaintance with most of the squires—in the *field*, but not at their *tables*. As we have said, it never led to equality; partly, perhaps, because the Adam and Eve of the family had risen from lower beginnings, and partly because they were contented with their lot, and had no ambition to be the objects of condescension.

Unfortunately, this sort of contentment is not apt to encourage very aspiring views of education, and is especially hard upon the females of such a race. The Miss Philpots had, time out of mind, been considered the prettiest and the best girls in that part of the country, but both they and their parents were aware that a rattle on the harpsicord, and a little French acquired at a country boarding-school, were not enough to command high connections, and none had ever occurred to take them out of their unassuming course.

But this was not the chief matter to be amended in the generation Philpot. It had never been said that any member of it had been improvident, as far as concerned himself, but folks who have a turn for hounds and horses, however they may pay their own way, have not always a turn for paying the

way for those who come after them. The property was entailed and never encumbered, and every one of the possessors had fully intended to lay by for the younger branches, some day or other, but unluckily they all died before that day arrived. Consequently, up to the time of Tom and his brothers and sisters, the Philpot share of the good things of the world had fallen entirely to the squire for the time being, and the rest of the family might have been likened to the scraps of waste paper in the tail of a kite, which, shape it as you will, is thereby proclaimed to be no genuine bird.

It remained for Tom to make the first move for clearing away this reproach, and the good fellow did it in a manner so unusual, that we are almost afraid our mention of it will look like an endeavour “to draw men as they ought to be, not as they are.” He succeeded his father shortly before he had reached the popular age of twenty-one, and the tribe went on living under the same roof, in all respects as it had done heretofore; his two younger brothers and his two sisters having the established prospects of those who had gone before them; which is to say, the very ample ones that expand in the regions of chance. They were quite contented, knowing that such was the Philpot ordinance, and felt that no arrangement could be happier; but Tom thought otherwise. Still he said nothing till the day on which his next brother reached the twenty-first birthday; a day which, to him, seemed pretty much the same as all other days. But it was not by any means so. On that

day Tom communicated to him a fact which he had learnt on winding up his father's affairs, and this fact was that his father, who was too jovial an old man to trouble his head about anything but hounds and haystacks, had omitted to renew the entail of the paternal acres, leaving them by will, which he probably thought the same thing, and thus conveying them absolutely to Tom.

Well, what did Tom do ? On the day in question he handed over the fifth part of these acres to his brother ; and, to shorten as much as we can this account of his singular want of respect for the time-honoured claims of primogeniture, we may as well throw together the other three destitutes, to whom three more shares were devoted in like manner. He was now as happy as if he had inherited a hundred thousand a year ; and having seen his brothers established in respectable business, and his sisters suitably married, trod his fifth share and the family hall with no care at heart but the dispersion of those he had provided for, whose fortunes had divided them in far different directions.

All this Crowley had heard, not only from his aunt, but by the bed-side of the Vicar ; from the old man himself, as far as he could articulate, from Lucy (who spoke of Tom with a frankness which certainly did not look like anything beyond friendship), from the two doctors, and likewise from two or three chance visitors at the Rosary. As he approached Huntsmore Lodge he revolved it well in his mind. If he had a peculiarity, it was—as we believe we have already said—a more than

common generosity, and he felt that to come between this poor fellow and his hopes, if he had any, would be an unworthy presumption upon his own superior pretensions, and a cruelty from which he could derive no happiness. On the contrary, Tom should have as fair a chance of success as could be given him, and not a syllable should be breathed in his own interest till it was clear that such chance was hopeless.

A short turning from his road brought him to the door of Huntsmore Lodge. We have no desire to say much in its description. It was a perpetration of the reign of Queen Anne, built close upon the road, and entered by a step down instead of a step up. Large enough and gloomy enough to prove the lonely occupant quite proof against superstition, and not materially improved in shape by Tom himself, who had pulled down one half to repair the other. The old-fashioned ornamental bell, that looked like a crooked skeleton, seemed averse to strangers, and was a long time before it would announce one; when it did so, it was with a rusty scream that made the horses cock their ears for a start; and, some minutes afterwards, the door was forced open by a lad in a stable dress, with eyes and mouth a-gape for something wonderful. It was Tom's whipper-in, who, between whiles, acted as footman and butler, valet and what not.

Mr. Philpot was at home, and Crowley was ushered into a low damp entrance, used as an armoury for every known implement of sport, and decorated with a good many of its trophies, which,

with the assistance of the moth, had an effect rather spectral. The room into which he passed from this museum was a little less dismal, and perhaps, to a sporting bachelor, might have been very comfortable, for it contained everything he had ever wanted or ever could want, all studiously arranged by the valet after the manner in which he littered his horses.

Tom was sitting with his back to the door, and his face bent down to some minute work on a table, so that he was not aware of a visitor, and was taken by surprise. On recognising Crowley his face shared a good deal in the confusion of his surroundings. Fortunately he had one hand disengaged to receive a friendly shake; the other he held at a respectful distance, with the thumb and finger pressed together, as if he had been about to take a pinch of snuff, but it turned out that they held something more dangerous. He was, in fact, as he said when he had expressed his thankfulness for Mr. Crowley's very kind and unexpected call, employed in tying a few ginger hackles to catch a trout or two for poor Mr. Bloomer.

"I find, Mr. Philpot, you are always occupied in good offices for your neighbours, which makes me the more ashamed of myself for not having expressed my own obligations several days ago. But you are aware, I daresay, that on the morning after you were good enough to do my commission to Miss Longland, I was suddenly installed as doctor's assistant at the vicarage. Every disposable moment has been passed there, which I am sure

you will excuse for the good tidings I bring you of the Vicar and Miss Longland, and her friend Miss Lightfoot."

Tom was full of thanks and rejoicings, but Crowley remarked that something brought a flush in his face, and that he turned his back as he spoke, to clear a chair of several articles more appropriate to his wardrobe.

"I was in hopes," resumed Crowley, ascribing the flush to the cause maintained by Mrs. Toogood, "that we should have the advantage of your assistance under these alarming circumstances, for you know I am a mere stranger, and my consolations could be of very little value; but I have been informed that, in common with all the friends of Miss Longland, not even excepting Miss Lightfoot, you have found the vicarage no more to your taste than mine."

"It is quite true," replied Tom, "that I am not distinguished by the good-will of Mrs. Bloomer, who only accords it on condition that you accept none from anybody else. I could only have gone there on pain of being turned out, and have been obliged to obtain intelligence by waylaying the servants."

"I am happy, Mr. Philpot, that future enquiries may be made with less trouble, as the Vicar is about to change his abode for an indefinite time to Oaken-dell, accompanied by Miss Longland, Miss Lightfoot, and Mrs. Toogood. One of the chief objects of my visit here this morning is to express a hope that, as a party of such friends is likely to be agreeable to

you, I may reckon upon being very often favoured by your assistance in its entertainment. My aunt will let you know when the doctor allows Mr. Bloomer to come, and on that day, and as many after it as you may chance to be disengaged, I trust we may have the pleasure of your company to dinner, and at all times when you are so disposed."

Whatever might have been the nature of Tom's first flush, there was no doubt about the second.

"Disengaged! Oh, he had no engagements; and, if he had, they would have been of no importance whatever—not the slightest. He should have the greatest possible—very much indeed—of doing himself the particular—"

So that point being settled, Crowley turned his attention to one or two others which were of not much less consequence to his plans for giving Tom a fair start against himself. The first of these was the important article of costume, in which Tom had certainly room for improvement, but it was a puzzling theme to introduce. A portrait, however, of a hearty old gentleman, who turned out to be the last Squire Philpot, and was as creditable an effort of a gifted glazier in the next town as we usually expect to find under rural patronage, led to it very naturally.

"The fashions," said Crowley, without seeming to notice the peculiar fashion of the old gentleman's son Thomas, "have strange vicissitudes. It cannot be very many years since that portrait was painted, and yet how different they are now. I hope we may at last be coming to a stand, and that the world is

beginning to think the best criterion of fashion to be the best fit, so that when we are dressed we may be able to take Lord Chesterfield's advice, and forget we are dressed at all."

"I wish to heaven *I* could, Mr. Crowley! It would be a great blessing; but Broome Warren is an out-of-the-way place, and I'm afraid there is not much chance of improvement in anything, especially amongst the tailors."

"Indeed."

"Yes, especially amongst them: for instead of allowing me to forget I am dressed, they make me remember it every moment of my life."

"Really. In what way?"

"Why, they cut the waistcoat so high, and the waistband so low, that there's no making them meet without a strain of the braces that galls one like the withers of a dog-horse. No moving an arm without establishing a raw, and no standing upright without risking every button at once!"

"You surprise me! I should have thought that such fashions must subject you to dangerous hazards in mounting your horse."

"Oh, that's the greatest misery of all. I am always obliged to insist upon long coat tails."

This was a little too much for Crowley's gravity, and even Tom could scarcely control a look of dismal drollery.

"I have often," he continued, "thought of putting myself in other hands, but I don't know where to go. We know nothing and nobody down here, and

go on in the same rough road for ever, because we have worn the ruts too deep to get out of them."

"I have often heard similar complaints, for there are many people who would rather endure a life of pain than exert themselves a moment for relief. It is immensely hard, in prospect, to break through old habits. I have found it so myself, but, having faced the trial, I have always found it existed merely in imagination. With regard to the tailors, I should recommend the measurement of a London artist, and would guarantee that you might afterwards wear your coat tails of any length you please."

Tom looked wistfully, for he thought that if he only had Crowley's tailor, he might in some degree resemble him; and Crowley had soon a fair opportunity of laying him under obligations, by writing the address on the back of his own card, feeling satisfied that reasonable amends might be made to the country practitioner by a few recommendations about the 5th of November.

He then addressed himself to another item of Tom's necessities; and observing a few tattered books on a pendant shelf, asked whether he could recommend him anything new, but Tom's plight in that respect was worse than it had been in the former one, though he was equally frank.

"To say the truth," he replied, "the fashion for reading has penetrated as little into these parts as the genius for tailoring, and our family have

never introduced any innovation. They have always thought that they got on very well without it, and saw no reason why their sons could not do the same. A few books on farming and farriery, and such things as applied to their own pursuits, they had no objection to; but for anything else, they left us to choose for ourselves, considering that if we had a turn for deeper studies it would show itself, like the poppies in the stubble, which spring up in proportion to the absence of cultivation."

The illustration would perhaps have been more just if poppies had not been weeds, and so thought Tom; but home-spun ornaments may be excused for a loose stitch, when we see so many ragged examples of higher pretensions.

"My father, however," he pursued, "did send us to school in the next town till we were old enough to be of use in trapping pole-cats and weasels. But nothing ever came of it except the canings. My mother had kept us at home till we grew too restive to be managed, and after the first year Dr. Leather-head sent us back, with the intimation that it was of no use to model with clay that had become as hard as a stone. He had done his best to beat it into a malleable state, but these mollifying applications had only left a few external traces, like the raddle on our sheep, and the stamps upon our bullocks, to distinguish us from the cattle of other people. My father was quite contented, for he had no desire that we should be idling over books, when he wanted us with the hounds, and we were dutiful

enough to think him always in the right. I beg your pardon, Mr. Crowley, for this family history, but it is right that I should show you how little you will find in me. Of books, I believe, I don't know the names of a dozen, I wish I did."

"Then pray allow me to place my own library, which has been brought down to Oakendell, and is very good and very miscellaneous, entirely at your disposal. Fashions, as I have said, are continually changing, and, just at present, there is a very prevailing one for reading the works of the day. I have observed that ladies particularly have taken it up so eagerly, that there is no road so short, or so certain to their attention, as a disquisition upon the last new publication. You will find most of them upon my shelves, and I hope you will always carry off what you like, whether I am at home or not. And now I must wish you good morning, for I have a good many preparations to make."

He thought this enough for the first lesson towards qualifying Tom for conquest, and got up to depart. Tom saw him to his conveyance with unbounded thanks for the honour he had done him, and the great advantage he should derive from it. He then returned to his ginger hackles, full of admiration of his new friend, and very much improved in opinion of himself for having been thought worthy of so long a visit.

But he could not tie his flies ; he was quite in a flutter about something else, which might have been guessed by his frequent recurrence to the address of the tailor, and having pinned his thumb and finger

together with a little crooked Limerick hook, he came to the conclusion that he should catch no fish that day. There was no knowing how soon he might be called upon to shine at Oakendell, or how long Messrs. Schneiders and Co. might take to equip him for it. So he folded up his ginger hackles, sucked his punctured fingers, and struggled into his last provincial cut, after which he summoned his factotum, and ordered his dog-cart.

“If anybody should want me, say I am gone to London to be meas—on particular business—and just look about for my cobbler’s wax.”

He forgot that he had been raking his hair to stir up his wits for conversation, and afterwards found the missing treasure where he was not likely to miss it again for some time.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE improvements at Oakendell had made a rapid advance. A confidential servant who had been left in London had brought down the needful supply of servants, and the remainder of the horses were installed safely in the renovated stables. The house was handsomely furnished, the ruined garden turfed, gravelled, and tastefully fenced in from the forest, and complete in everything but the flowers. As far, however, as the nearest florist could fill the beds with such as were transferable, and surround the walls with all his varieties of blooming stands, there was no cause for complaint. The handsome old house looked as if it had never been destitute of dwellers of the better class, and was the centre of hues and odours, with which its long despairing mistress could not fail to be enchanted. Crowley was certainly so by anticipation.

He did not see Mrs. Rokins and pretty Susan, for they had trudged down to the Rosary, two or three days before, for his honour's washing, and had been made happy by another conversation with him.

"Now, Mrs. Rokins," he had said, "I leave you and pretty Sukey the entire charge of preparing the apartments for the young ladies, who must be placed within chatting distance; because, you know, young ladies have always a great deal to say to each other when there's nobody to tell what it is."

"Lord love your Honour!" replied the laughing dame, "how did you find that out?"

Sukey also laughed, and rather slyly, as if she thought he must have heard some edifying little dialogues.

"And remember, Mrs. Rokins, the old gentleman must be established close by. As for Mrs. Toogood, she must have the best room you can find her, but as far as possible from our other friends, for fear of being troubled with their secrets."

And obliged, thought mother and daughter, who were well aware of Mrs. Toogood's propensities, to keep them awake all night with advice to go to sleep.

"Never you fear, your Honour," said the former. "I know well enough what Miss Lucy would like; and she shall be better off than ever she was yet. But, when all's done, we can be of more service in our own little home than ever we can be at Oaken-dell; for your ladies and gentlemen in the servants' hall understand everything a great deal better, and Sukey and I must go and set about your Honour's washing. We shan't be far off, and the cot wants airing, and the tubs want scrubbing, and

a deal of other things want doing which is more in our way."

"As you please, Mrs. Rokins ; but remember, you both belong to me, or I to you, and we'll help one another along as well as we can."

"Lord ha' mercy!" exclaimed the good woman, as they turned away with their baskets. "I never see such a gentleman, nor Miss Lucy neither."

Intelligence flies quickly in remote parts where there are few rival incidents, and that which respected Oakendell had made a wide circuit. Crowley found on his hall table, amongst the usual cards from tradespeople—including Tom's tailor, who referred him to that gentleman's recommendation—a collection of others which showed that he was not destined to enjoy the seclusion he had promised himself. A new resident whose name and family were so well known, was too great a windfall in the provinces to be indulged with such out-of-the-way fancies, and the county families from all distances had lost no time in calling. But not many of them are connected with our history, and those that are will appear when they are wanted. The first attention was due to Lady Goldfield, whose letter, it may be remembered, had tempted him to that part of the country. There was nothing to prevent him from disposing of the rest of his day by a drive to Goldsworthy Park ; and thither he bent his way.

The prospect of a pleasant visit created some diversion in his painful thoughts, and the breezy sunshine over a wild tract of blooming heath, amid the carol of larks and linnets, did equal good to the

damaged state of his nerves. By degrees he made some attempt to persuade himself that it was full soon to determine whether the flying shot from Lucy's eyes had really been fatal, or only a near miss. That he felt her to be different from everyone else was sure enough, but it was the quality of all rarities to fix an interest till their rarity ceased. We cannot correctly estimate the brightness of one star till we compare it with another, and perhaps some of the young celebrities of Goldsworthy might be visiting their mother. At all events, he should enjoy some relief in the conversation of Lady Goldfield after the depressing sedatives of Aunt Too-good.

The park and mansion of Goldsworthy wanted none of the features which give grandeur and romance to many another seat of our noble families ; but as we do not set up in opposition to the Tourist's Guide Book, and are, moreover, fearful of exceeding the proportions which history can allow to description, we leave rolling forests and shining streams, and columns and terraces, to the illustrations of that highly attractive work.

Crowley alighted amongst the statues and exotics that crowded the stately portal, and was conducted through a line of tall telegraphs from vestibule to hall, and from hall to gallery till his name was caught by another tall telegraph, like the wicket keeper in a cricket match. But before we go farther we will just anticipate what sort of a lady Lady Goldfield was to prove.

Of course she must be lofty and dignified, and

spreading like one of the mighty beech trees we have just passed, and feathering over the velvet with excess of foliage, radiant with smiles, redoubtable for their conscious favour, appalling in affability, and about fifty-five years old. Of course her courtly condescensions are the rapture of the county ; of course Justice Bulfinch and his brothers of the bench are never tired of proclaiming how they are invited to dinner once a quarter, and of course the entranced families of the doctor and the curate are desolate when their dear Countess goes to town for the season. She has indeed twice the merit of ladies in a lower grade, for she is an excellent person of one sort in the country, and an excellent person of quite another sort in the world of fashion. In the former, she is the splendid three-decker laid up in ordinary, with her fleet of frigates waiting to be put in commission, and all the cock boats of the harbour collected under her lee ; at Almack's she is the flag ship, leading the frigates into action, and looking out for prizes ; and a great deal too deep in her tactics to hoist a signal to the small craft she left in port. If they ever get adrift in those high latitudes we very much fear she may chance to run them down. It is awful navigation through the Straits of May Fair, and there is no anchorage at all for small vessels in the Gulf of Belgravia. The mighty ship could never shorten sail to take the Justice Bulfinch in tow, and the curate's light keels would be omens more disastrous than Mother Carey's Chicken.

Shall we see any likeness to this stereotyped dow-

ager in our Countess at Goldsworthy ? The gentleman in waiting announces Mr. James Crowley, who is gratified by a lively exclamation of surprise, and received with a smile very much too genuine to have ever wreathed or writhed in masquerade. She is very fair, very simply, but very elegantly, attired, has a mere trifle of that roundness of form so becoming to a fine figure that has seen some forty years, and her hair is dark and glossy as it was on her wedding day. To which we may add the still more attractive charms of a graceful vivacity of manner, and a voice which can only have been modulated by something better than good taste. We believe none ever saw her without admiration, or knew her without loving.

Crowley being a near relation and loved from a boy, much of the subsequent conversation may be dispensed with till he was rather archly catechised upon the motives of his unaccountable retreat to the seclusion of a wild forest. Lady Goldfield had heard of his wondrous taste in decorating the romantic old house, and that all the country had been ransacked for the choicest flowers. She was not before aware that young single gentlemen had such a passion for them ; and, if it extended to *orange blossoms*, would immediately supply him with trees in full bloom.

Crowley laughed and shook his head, glancing at her beautiful braids as if he thought he knew where orange blossoms would be more in place.

“ You do not value them ? Well, I am disappointed ; but I am still very happy that you are

so far an exception to club life that you can remember what good you may gain by the supervision of your venerable aunt. Am I still at fault? Then I must imagine that you are worn out with London dissipations, as I am myself, though you have not been their victim quite so long, and I hope you mean to continue in the same mind. I have made up my own to live chiefly where we are, now that my girls have chosen their lots in life, and to seek happiness where it is not made a matter of competition."

" You have always looked forward to it, and I believe I may say that your determination gave the first suggestion for mine; though I hardly expected it would be so well kept when there were so many to lament it. You will not doubt how sincerely I was one of the number."

" Ah! my dear James! it is often the fate of poor womankind to begin the world anew. I never had any view but the happiness of my children, and, as that is now assured, the wrench from those habits is not so severe as it may seem. I should be more lonely in the crowd I have left than in this comparative solitude. There I should no longer have a motive in life, and here I have many, with the hope that I win love without cost, instead of toiling for it vainly at a great deal."

" You never toiled in vain, though the case is rare, for fashion is a contest in which few will dispute that the stake is greater than the prize; the one being never more than envy, and the other seldom less than peace of mind. Yet even miseries,

long endured, will sometimes become indispensable. The most *blasé* railer against the emptiness of fashion has generally the least courage to emancipate himself, and would die of dejection if he could. I never thought you could be so patient under the oppression of pure happiness."

" You praise me too soon; for I will not deny that there are occasional moments when the lights of mind that career in your Elysian miasmas would very much brighten this better atmosphere, and that solitude would be much pleasanter if it consisted of something more than nobody. I have been considering if the range of my country acquaintance would furnish me with some gifted girl, like my own, to restore me to the duties which have lost their occupation. But I know of none who have not either more cherished prospects, or else too little promise for a constant companion. I must engage you to look out for me. But, in the meantime, how does the dear aunt whose advice you are not good enough to take?"

" Upon my word," replied Crowley, " you do me wrong, for I am just going to take a great deal. She is coming to stay with me, and to bring the poor old Vicar of Broome Warren, who has been seriously ill, and also two young friends."

" I was very sorry to hear of his illness, though I do not know him. I did not like the description I heard of Mrs. Bloomer, and was afraid of making her acquaintance. But who are the young friends?"

" One of them is a Miss Lightfoot, very pleasant,

very sensible ; and if I may add so much without incurring suspicion, very pretty.”

“ And who is the other ?”

“ The other is Mr. Bloomer’s niece, who has lived with him from infancy, and comes to be his nurse.”

“ Miss Bloomer ?”

“ No—her name is Longland. She is the daughter of Sir Harry Longland, of Broome Warren Chase, who fell into difficulties many years ago, and was obliged to take refuge somewhere abroad, from whence he has never returned.”

“ Poor girl ! I have some remembrance of that misfortune, but it was before we came to this property, and I never heard the particulars. How came Sir Harry not to take his daughter with him ?”

“ He was hardly pressed, and had great confidence in the Vicar.”

“ Who scarcely proved himself worthy of the trust, by marrying a person so unfit to bring her up. I wish I had known of this ; but all our friends avoid Broome Warren. Yet, surely, Mrs. Toogood might have told me.”

“ My aunt has been very kind ; but we know too well that she has always projects of her own, and never believes them intelligible to any one else. Nevertheless, in spite of all disadvantages, I am persuaded that Miss Longland is just the person to win your regard. She is very much beloved by all who know her, and has a great deal of mind, entirely and highly cultivated by her own efforts.”

"Poor girl!" repeated Lady Goldfield. "Is she pretty, like her friend?"

"She is certainly very beautiful."

"When do they come to you?"

"I don't know the exact day; but very soon."

"I hope she will not think me troublesome if I come to explain the cause of my long seeming neglect. I could have endured many Mrs. Bloomers to give the forlorn girl such solace as she might have found here."

Crowley began to indulge some hope that fortune was making a tack, and turning off from the breakers. To have gained such sympathy for Lucy was like the beginning of a breeze of some promise; and he entered, as far as he could, into her history, without touching upon those parts of it which so much disturbed him; not omitting the accidental circumstances under which they became acquainted, or very skilfully concealing the impression she had made upon him. But Lady Goldfield made no more allusion to the orange-blossoms, for she had penetration to see the case was too serious; and, after enjoining him to let her know the moment Lucy arrived, changed the conversation to a subject which more nearly concerned herself.

"When I wrote to you in London," she said, "to say how much I desired your company here, I am sure you gave me credit for no selfish motive beyond the pleasure of seeing you,—a motive which has existed from very early days,—but I must now tell you that I had an additional one, for I want you to render me a service for which I can depend on no

one else. I am in trouble about my son. You have not seen much of him since he was a boy, for he went to Oxford after you left it, and fell amongst bad associates whose ambition was to be thought fast. Without showing any want of abilities, and with many of the good qualities which distinguished his father, I fear he wants others to direct them. He has seldom been here since he succeeded to his large inheritance, and on the last occasion I observed a change of manner and expression which betokened some pre-occupation of mind, and a cautious avoidance of inquiry into its cause. I have since heard that some of his favourite companions have made themselves remarkable in what are called sporting circles, and am naturally apprehensive that he may be doing the same; but I know not how to learn the truth. Inquiries would betray mistrust, and I cannot go to him entirely alone, for his house is far away, and I have no friend whose company would be desirable on such a visit; neither could I take a servant to bring back discreditable contrasts between my only son and such a father. In this anxiety I have felt there is no one to whom I can look but yourself; and I know you will not think I ask too much of you, although the favour is not a small one. I have pleased myself with the idea that you will be glad to comfort me by going to see him, and observing the nature of those pursuits which he thinks it puerile to confide to a mother. To you he may be more communicative; and, if he is engaged in any way injurious to his name and fortune, I

may, with your assistance, arrest him before it is too late."

"My dear Lady Goldfield, I only wish you had called upon me the first moment you imagined I might be of service. I have for some time contemplated the visit you propose; for I confess I have heard reports that he has shown a disposition for the turf and the sort of society which is considered indispensable to it. He used once to be very frank with me about his undertakings, but it is long since I have heard from him, and I have suspected that it is because he is aware there are things in which our tastes very widely differ. If he needs advice, he cannot have it too soon; and, as he once sought mine, I trust he may still be disposed to take it. I will set off to him to-morrow, and you shall see me as soon as I return."

"I never doubted your readiness. I wish I had the same happy confidence in the tidings you may bring. We have witnessed such examples of thoughtless degeneracy in these days—such rapid ruin of revered names and boundless patrimonies, for the mere bravado of defying prudence and becoming great among the worthless—that I shall tremble to see you. Whatever my worldly position may be, I am but a lone and anxious woman, who strives hard to be worthy of the past, and should be crushed, perhaps more than others, by a fall in the family reputation."

Crowley was touched by the confidence she placed in him, no less than by the sorrow in her fine countenance; but he had too little knowledge of

Lord Goldfield's present occupations to afford very cheering encouragement. The most he could do was to represent that, whatever courses might have been followed, they had not had time to reach to any dangerous extent; and, with this reliance, he succeeded in bringing the subject to an end less desponding than its commencement. He then possessed himself of all farther hints that could be given for his guidance, and took his leave, as every one else did from that house, with a very small idea of the length of his stay.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAVING no knowledge of the forest, and being lost in thought, there was no great difficulty in taking the wrong road, and this led him on to another visit and another home in distress, though not quite of the same sort. In a tangled lane, with a wilderness on each side, he came upon a small ruinous cottage, fenced in by broken palings to protect a few cabbages from the forest pigs, and exhibiting a bit of board upon a pole, with the name of "Mrs. Rokins, Washerwoman." A miserable starved pony was hanging his head by the wicket, with a vehicle at his heels, only describable under the equally mysterious denomination of a Trap; and, within doors, was distinguishable a chorus of several angry voices. He immediately stopped and made his way to the entrance, which was open, though a clothes-horse, with linen hanging to dry, concealed the interior.

Looking over this, he was not a little surprised to see Mr. Christopher Cheek, strutting in majestic rage amongst the wash-tubs, with a brace of hang-man-like assistants awaiting his commands; whilst whirling from one to the other, in a storm of ex-

asperation and terror, was the excellent Mrs. Rokins.

"I tell you," she exclaimed, "it's an imposition and a robbery! I haven't got the rent, and I wouldn't pay it if I had, for Mr. Cheek here knows well enough he ought to pay it hisself. Why couldn't he let me earn my living? Ask him that! What business had he to take me and Sukey away from our work, three or four months ago, to mind his hogs at Oakendell, and never give us the value of a bad sixpence."

"Hold your peace, Mrs. Rokins," thundered Mr. Cheek, "and don't suppose you are going to scold the sheriff's officers out of their duty. They are come to have the money or the goods; and, as you won't give the money, the goods they'll have."

"Will they! I should like to see 'em!" retorted the good dame spreading a pair of hard-working red arms, dappled with soap-suds, to defend her treasures. "I tell you, if you lay hands upon a single thing you'll have a greater fear of wash-tubs than you ever had yet; and you've feared 'em long enough in all conscience, Mr. Cheek, ever since you was born, for you've never trusted them with more than one shirt a week—to sing Psalms of a Sunday—ever since you was born!"

"Mr. Solomon and Mr. Isaacs"—we cannot tell how it is, that sheriff's officers always hail from Jerusalem—"do your duty, and don't be stopped by the ravings of this old mad woman!"

"Come, Missis," said one of the Hebrew gentlemen, with wonderful eyebrows and a squint that

looked behind him, “ stand aside, and be quiet, will you ?”

“ I won’t ! I tell you, I won’t !” and her cap fell off and her grey hair tumbled about her shoulders. “ I know what makes him so savage with me, I do ! It’s because my daughter Sukey won’t go a-nightst him for the milk which he pretended for a charity, but was only for things worser — that’s what it is !”

“ Take care, mother,” replied the other fellow, with a nose that curled into his thick lips, “ how you handle the character of a honourable gent as is a Justice of the Quorum. I must have these delicate shirts you’re a-ironing, and the white waistcoats in the tub, and the trowsers, and the t’other things that’s a-riding on the horse.”

“ You must, must you ?” shrieked Mrs. Rokins, preparing to do battle with all three. “ If you durst ! If you durst ! tell you they be Squire Crowley’s shirts ! And d’ye think he ain’t to have a shirt to his back or a pair of——Ha ! keep your dirty fingers to scratch your heads, and never fancy they are going to make his Honour walk about stark naked. I know how it is, and so does everybody. His Honour took Oakendell without letting his worship finger the rent, or mistake Miss Lucy’s dues for his own, as he has done the last dozen years. And he has lost the fields he has never paid for, and has been obliged to drive home the bullocks which he fatted for nothing, and has been made a honest man in spite of hisself. That’s where it is. We all know Mr. Cheek.”

"Where's your sack, Mr. Solomon?" roared the foaming Mr. Cheek, forgetting in his fury that the bird whose plumage he was going to appropriate was the pet of his patroness, Mrs. Toogood. "Bundle everything in at once, and have a sale on Broome Warren Green."

"And what it fetches over and above the rent, Missis, shall be returned," added one vagabond.

"And if it don't fetch enough, we can come again, next washing day," superadded the other.

"You shan't! You durstn't!" still maintained the magnanimous old lady. "I've sent my Sukey to Mr. Crowley hisself. And here she is! And now you'll see whether he's a gentleman to stand by and see folks run away with his small clothes. Now we shall see!"

The men made a pause in their operations, as Sukey entered breathless by the back-door, to see if she had brought the rent, and Cheek looked scared at the chance of her being followed by Crowley. They were, however, more courageous than before, when the frightened girl exclaimed,— "Mother, his Honour ain't at home! He was gone to Goldsworthy."

"Clear out that back room first," commanded the hard creditor. "There's more things there, and we must have all. In with you!"

And in they went, and after them rushed the determined Mrs. Rokins. Sukey, who had overrun herself, remained panting against the wall.

"Sukey," said Cheek, in a sly, subdued voice, "Sukey, my girl, come farther this way, and we'll

stop all this row in a moment. Come, I say, to the door, and hear what I've got to say."

And he pulled the exhausted girl close to the clothes-horse which concealed Crowley.

" You come for the milk, Sukey, as you used to do, and I promise you it shall be all right."

And here he added a few words in a whisper, quite audible to Crowley through the flimsy partition of his own shirts, for which Sukey, concentrating all her strength for a grand effort, saluted his worship with a box on the ear, which might almost have sent him through the wall. Before he knew the precise end on which he was standing, the horse was kicked aside, and he felt a clutch upon his collar, and a shake that made his teeth chatter, followed up by a Katherine wheel evolution far amongst the cabbages.

" Well done, my little girl! You gave him a good one!" said Crowley, turning round to pretty Sukey, who had recoiled from the force of her own smack, and staggered back to a chair.

Mr. Cheek thus gaining breath to pick up his hat and adjust his necktie, glared about him to understand what had happened, and proclaimed his exploit with a yell to the catchpoles, who bounced in with Mrs. Rokins still at their skirts.

" Lord love your Honour's handsome face!" she cried. " I was sure you'd come! Now take his Honour's clothes off his back! Now have a sale on Broome Warren Green! Now leave him without a stocking to his foot, or a night-cap to his head! I should like to see you! I should!—I should!"

"Take notice!" bellowed the justice, with his features distorted out of humanity, and discoloured as if he had made a dive in the soap-suds, with a dash of blue starch in them. "Take notice! I have been assaulted in my magisterial duty!"

"Your duty!" cried the dishevelled Sukey, starting up like a little volcano. "Was it your duty to tell how you were to be bought off, with your two thieves? Was it your duty to sell justice, and at such a price, you wicked, filthy old man? You've got it at last, and I only wish his Honour had shaken your head off!"

"Hold your tongue, you squalling termagant. And take notice, Mother Rokins, that you have this house under *me*, as agent to the property, and that I order you to quit, bag and baggage, to-morrow morning! To-morrow morning, Mother Rokins!"

"I shan't quit to-morrow morning, nor next day neither! I defy you! Turn me out if you durst! I hold this cot for my life from Sir Harry's blessed self, and under his own hand. Get over that! Get over that if you can!"

"Take notice, Mr. Solomon, and you, Mr. Isaacs, I've been assaulted in the execution of my duty. I, a magistrate of the county. Take notice, I never shook him in return. Take notice, it was all on one side! I'm ready to make oath I never touched him!"

"But if you don't take care of yourself," interrupted Crowley, "I shall be obliged to touch *you* again. So make your way out of Mrs. Rokins' premises, or I shall most assuredly help you."

" You hear him, Mr. Solomon ! You hear him, Mr. Isaacs ! and can bear witness that I never threatened Mr. Crowley ! You shall hear of it, Mr. Crowley ! you shall hear of it !"

And, with that, Mr. Cheek stamped furiously out of the gate, attended by his followers, with a loud, alternate jargon about the sheriff and his officers, assaults, batteries, penalties, and the county jail. They all tumbled into Mr. Cheek's equipage, and went off as fast as the poor raw bones could jolt them over the ruts, flogging him all the way as heartily as if he had been Mr. James Crowley.

Not the least difficulty encountered by him was to keep off the transports of Mrs. Rokins, whose triumph and admiration incited her very strongly to fling her arms about his neck, soap-suds and all ; and he made matters more perilous by his handsome recognition of her brave defence of his wardrobe. Modest little Sukey stood hiding her face in the background, full of shame at having been so prominent, dropping curtsies without number, and murmuring to herself how ardently she hoped his Honour's arm would be as strong for the next hundred years. And then his Honour presented a hand to each of them, and jumped into his curriicle, very much amused with his tournament, and very little caring what might be its consequences.

Certainly, Mr. Cheek's treatment was trying to the feelings of a gentleman who, for so many years, had esteemed himself the first in Broome Warren, and expected every one else to do so. The speed of his retreat appeared to cause these feelings to

flare up more fiercely, and the increased action of the air set him in a conflagration. He very soon flogged the lash off his whip, when the pony, finding his driver had exhausted all persuasion for a gallop, followed the example of Miss Pen's Edward, and stood still. Messrs. Solomon and Isaacs being thus relieved from the necessity of holding their breath, and whatever else they could catch, began to be active in the application of extinguishers; though the flames, as the firemen say, had got too far ahead.

"Mr. Sheeks, your worship," said the first of these comforters, "I think we have made a very good day's work; for, if we have not got the goods, we have got the shakings, and we shall have the damages."

"Yes, your worship," said the other, "and they will be in proportion to the violence of the shakings; for which, if I was you, I should be much obliged—very—and I wish I had got such a swing-swanging myself. I saw it from the first, but I would not interfere, because I was in hopes he would do it again."

Cheek was in no mood to exult, and so he cursed them both for not having done their duty with more dispatch.

"Don't you be angry with your good fortune," was the advice of Mr. Solomon. "Consider you are Justice of the Peace, and such luck never happened before! It will be fifty or a hundred pounds in your pocket."

"No, don't you be angry, Mr. Sheek," was the

consolation of Mr. Isaacs. “I will take my oath before the judge and jury that he shook your worship very nearly almost into nothing at all.”

“The devil take you both!” exploded Mr. Cheek’s gratitude, whilst he took the small end of his whip to belabour the poor pony with the handle. “I promised you, if you did your duty, a sovereign a-piece; but, as you only stood by and stared, I wouldn’t give you sixpence to save you from hanging!”

“Oh yes, your worship would!” said both at once, with a smile and a wink at each other.

“Oh yes,” continued Solomon, in a solo. “Your worship would never break your word when we ran such a risk for you.”

“Oh no,” snuffled Isaacs, through his crooked nose; “when you put our conscience to such a trial; for your worship knows that the penalty for bribing a sheriff’s-officer is five hundred pounds.”

Cheek was turning round upon them with another volley of reproaches, but stopped short and changed his mind. His friends knew their trade better than he thought.

“Bribe!” he exclaimed; “whoever dreamt of confounding a recompense with a bribe? A recompense which neither of you deserve; and I tell you again, that I wouldn’t give a sixpence to save you from hanging, if I hadn’t promised. A promise is a promise—no gentleman breaks a promise.”

“Oh,” replied Eyebrows, smiling deferentially, “we know your worship never does.”

“Oh,” continued Snuffle, “everybody knows it is

quite impossible ; and, as we've come to our turning home, perhaps your worship will be good enough to hand over the recompense." And they both held out their immaculate palms,

Check magnanimously thrust his hand in his breeches-pocket, and drew out two sovereigns, resisting like two eye-teeth. He had the gratification of receiving two bows of polite acknowledgment, which he returned as politely to the tail of his pony with another whack from the handle of his whip, at the same time jerking the rein with all his might to "shoot them" on their path. As they descended, they bowed and twitched off their hats, but had another word to say in behalf of Mrs. Rokins, whom he might also think entitled to a slight recompense.

"Mrs. Rokins ! What have you to do with Mrs. Rokins ?"

"Oh, no more than his worship had to do with her daughter ! Only she might take it into her head that the execution in her cottage was not strictly according to law, seeing that she claimed wages to a much greater amount than her rent—that was all—excepting that Sukey might want a trifle for something else."

It is lucky that the grand agent of evil is not always at leisure to take charge of his consignments, or Messrs. Solomon and Isaacs would have had cause to rue the day when they made game of Justice Cheek. The parting was brief and bitter ; and the pony finding himself lightened of two substantial passengers, and being fully sensible of many weighty reasons for putting his best leg foremost,

plunged off with a will that very soon conveyed his driver out of sight and hearing.

"I tell you what, Isaacs," said Mr. Solomon, "we had better go back and make it up with Mrs. Rokins, for our work this morning may get us into trouble."

"I was just thinking so," returned Mr. Isaacs "and have something in my head which we can puzzle out as we go."

Whereupon they squared their elbows and retraced their steps.

Cheek returned home with his ideas so rudely tempest-tossed, that there seemed small chance of their ever floating in the same whirlpool again, unless upon a high tide of gin-and-water; but the tide of that day brought nothing to speak of, and only increased the commotion. It was almost dark when Nelly went in to remind him that he had not dined, and to inquire whether he would have his dinner or his supper, because both were ready.

He grumbled out that he did not want either; but seeing that he was in one of his absent fits, which were of very frequent occurrence, she remained in the room, as if expecting that he would presently change his mind, and she had not been long observing him, before she perceived that his abstraction was more than usual. She was a girl of sharp understanding, and had seen, very soon after she came into his service, that besides his general desire to be thought a man of consequence, there was some particular object of ambition which occupied him more than anything else, and to which his

great straining for important estimation seemed subservient. She had seen that his fears for this estimation had been very much alarmed by Crowley's engagement of a property over which he had assumed the control. The singular visit of Aaron had likewise given his confidence a shake, and a much greater one, and so had Mrs. Bloomer's ignominious dismissal in face of the crowd, over whom he had so long domineered. Captain Cox's mysterious visit had caused him a new convulsion with downward tendency, and he had come home, four or five hours ago, with some terrible provocation, which had overset him like a little earthquake. Altogether she suspected that affairs at Green Lane's End were fast converging to a *coup d'état*. Her real object in remaining was to tell him, as soon as he was inclined to listen, the discovery she had communicated to Polly Lightfoot the night before, and which she had not been able to tell him, as she had engaged, because she found on her return that he was fast asleep, and this morning, he had gone out too early to prepare his operations against Mrs. Rokins. She was about to assist her observations by reminding him of the commission he had given her, and which other matters had driven out of his head, when, just under his window, a burst of unearthly music, composed of cow's horns and frying pans, made him spring from his arm-chair as if he would have sprung through the ceiling.

"What the —— is that?" he shouted. "Go along and see."

Nelly went out, and was absent a few minutes during which the strain sometimes gave way to a colloquy, and sometimes made him jump again with more stunning clamour, in the midst of which Nelly came back, with something between a laugh and a sneer, and said it was nothing at all.

“Nothing at all! What is it, I say?”

“Nothing; only the reason why you didn’t want your dinner.”

“Death and fury! and what reason is that? Can’t you speak?”

“Well, if you must have it, it is Jack Rokins, who got to his mother’s just after you left, and has brought all the other boys to play the tune they say you danced to.”

Mr. Cheek seized his blackthorn, and made a sortie from his garrison, but only charged through the perils of his farm-yard, to see the enemy retreat, and hear a wild hurrah for Squire Crowley. Panting and raging with disappointment, he had hardly time to resume his seat, when a rattle at the house-door brought another interruption. This was an express from Lympton, bearing a letter of large dimensions for Christopher Cheek, Esq., J.P., &c., &c.

Wondering what it could be, but persuaded it must have some connection with magisterial affairs, he broke the seal in expectation of reading something to impress Nelly with a more profound reverence than she was likely to entertain from the proclamations of Jack Rokins.

“Sir,” it began, “We are instructed by Mrs. Rokins—”

Here he moderated his tone, and read only for his own enjoyment, for all that Nelly could gather was that she had never seen a gentleman look so astonished.

“Sir,” he began again to himself, “We are instructed by Mrs. Rokins on her own part, and likewise on the part of Miss Susan Rokins, her daughter, to request immediate payment of two shillings per week for each of these ladies for the care of a certain mansion and outbuildings, known as Oakendell House, during the last three months, and another payment for soap, sandpaper, mops, and scrubbing brushes, and sundry other appliances for the renovation of the same, the whole amounting to £14 13s. 3½d., deducting therefrom £1 10s., the same being the half-yearly amount of rent, due last Saturday se’night, for the dwelling house and appurtenances occupied by them in that portion of the forest denominated Dead Man’s Lane.

“Irrespective of the above, we beg to give notice that we are further instructed to commence an action for forcible entrance upon the last named premises, and an attempt to make seizure of certain wearing apparel, the property of James Crowley, Esq., of Oakendell House, in this county, under warrant of a writ obtained by false pretences, and involving certain wrongful affidavits.

“Totally unconnected with the foregoing, we have the painful duty of announcing yet another prosecution on the part of Miss Susan Rokins, for damages in a case of most alarming personal outrage.

“Being always averse to litigation, when it may be possible to arrive at amicable adjustment, we beg leave to add, entirely and exclusively on our own parts, and altogether without direction, consent, privity, or prejudice to our clients, that if these highly serious matters can, in any way, be satisfactorily arranged without going into court, the county, and especially the bench of magistrates, will be spared a great scandal.

“We have the honour to remain, sir,

“Your most obedient humble servants,

“FOX AND FERRET.”

This was, no doubt, the something which tickled the heads of Messrs. Isaacs and Solomon when they parted from his worship, and took their way to Mrs. Rokins.

There is no need to record Mr. Cheek’s remarks upon it.

It is a great mercy that storms produce calms, and that calms are more durable. The particular storm in the brains of Mr. Cheek had the effect of dispelling very much of their late unsettled weather, and gave him a clear and defined view of the line of his future proceedings. Nelly’s surmises in respect to some stupendous plan had been quite correct. There was no delaying another day, and, the determination once made, the best means of carrying it out so wholly occupied his mind, that the storm soon rumbled off in the distance, and left him in silent and deep reflection. Nelly remained

with him for orders till she had the satisfaction of seeing him snuff the candle with his fingers, and heard him muttering as he went up stairs to bed, “To-morrow or never!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE morning that succeeded Mr. Cheek's day of provocations was a very fine one, but he lay longer than usual in his bed, revolving some difficulties which it was necessary to overcome in the way to his grand design. The chief of these was to find the opportunity for it. But Fortune seemed to think she had been rather hard with him of late, and dropped in upon one of those visits of capricious good nature for which she often omits to give any particular reason. On this occasion she was the bearer of an early note from Mrs. Toogood, which Nelly slipped under the door with a knock and an intimation that it was half-past ten o'clock. Mr. Cheek rubbed his eyes and started up, in expectation that the events of yesterday had leagued his staunch patroness with the rest of the world; though he ought to have known by that time that the way of the world was always her strongest reason for taking another.

“Mrs. Toogood,” said the note, for her most friendly communications never confounded the difference of classes by more familiar beginnings, “is

extremely shocked to learn from her maid that Mr. Cheek was yesterday very grievously ill-used by her nephew, Mr. Crowley. Being informed that he is this morning gone to London, she will be glad to see Mr. Cheek at eleven o'clock to hear the circumstances of an outrage which her long knowledge of Mr. Cheek assures her must have been totally unprovoked, with a view of suggesting to her nephew an apology adequate to the offence. As Miss Longland is much concerned in entertaining a just appreciation of a gentleman so confidentially engaged for her father, and as Mr. Cheek must be discouraged by the extraordinary behaviour of Mrs. Bloomer from calling at the Vicarage to explain the facts, the bearer of this note will convey Mrs. Toogood's request that the young lady will oblige her by walking up at the same hour."

Mr. Cheek saw no more impediment in his way, and set to work at his toilet with a resolution which concluded it with more than ordinary perfection in the brief space of ten minutes. He had no leisure for breakfast, and was out of the house with a haste which made Nelly believe he was out of his wits also. His direction was the Rosary, but he had something else in prospect, for he stopped half-way to it and took a seat by the road side amongst the high broome, in which he could only be perceived by those who came close upon him. Here he looked over the landscape, with the glance of a kite over some projected pounce, and excited to a degree which obliged him to undo a button or two of his waistcoat.

For what was he waiting ? Many people would have thought twice before passing such a face in such a lonely spot ; for it was full a quarter-of-a-mile of wilderness, both from the village and the residence of Mrs. Toogood. Least of all would they have wished him to be met by Lucy Longland ; but Lucy it was who was destined for the encounter, and presently she appeared. Her light step was not heard till she came full upon him, when he clambered up upon his feet and pulled off his four-and-sixpenny with a jaunty air and his most prepossessing smile. The surprise caused her to start and colour up. She had always felt a great dislike to his expression, and his visage at that moment was not calculated to remove it.

“Good morning, my dear Miss Lucy,” he began ; “it is some time since I had the happiness of seeing you, and I rejoice to find you looking so well after your long attendance upon Mr. Bloomer. I sincerely hope he is better.”

Lucy replied coldly, and informed him that she was on her way to Mrs. Toogood, and had no time to stop.

Had Miss Pinhorn been present, she might possibly have acknowledged that Lucy really could put on a little dignity upon occasion ; but Mr. Cheek was too intent upon other things to perceive it.

“One moment, Miss Lucy, if I may be so bold. I am likewise on my way to Mrs. Toogood, to inquire for my dear friend, Mr. Bloomer ; but, upon second thoughts, I may intrude upon your visit, and had

rather speak to you here, as I have something to say which may be better without witnesses."

Lucy raised her eyebrows in a style that added more to her beauty than to Mr. Cheek's admiration.

"Upon *second* thoughts," she replied, "I rather wonder it did not occur to you *first*, that it is not of *me* you should inquire about my uncle, or request a conversation without witnesses."

"My dear young lady——"

"Or perhaps you think it better to inform me in private that you went with some cruel men to seize the trifles of a poor woman whose rent had been ten times paid by her hard labour, at your own desire. If this is all you have to say, I know it already; and likewise to whom I am obliged for her protection."

"Miss Lucy, it was a mistake. I vow and declare it was a mistake. Let me entreat you to sit down and hear me explain it!"

"It has been quite enough explained already. If you think otherwise, Mrs. Toogood is just as much concerned as I am. If you have other matters to speak of, as you intimate, it is not my wish to withhold any secrets from her." Here the indignant girl made a step to pass him, but he spread out his arms imploringly :

"I beg you will not judge so hastily! Every one knows how patiently you listen to those who come to you for charity, and it is really a charity that I wish to ask! You can't suppose that, if I had known Mrs. Rokins was a person in whom you took the slightest——"

"That is nothing to the point, Mr. Cheek. She is an object of respect; and, as such, had a claim to justice, independent of other reasons."

"But I assure you the men were hard-hearted brutes, and vastly exceeded their instructions."

"Had that been the case, it was so much the worse to employ them. But I have other accounts which do you as little credit as your present denial. I have heard quite enough; and against such things in future sufficient measures will be taken."

"Goodness, Miss Lucy! there is no need of any measures whatever; for I promise you Mrs. Rokins shall never be asked for any rent again."

"That is a matter for the consideration of your employer, and not to be esteemed an obligation to his servant. Perhaps, too, he may object to her spending her hard earnings in keeping her poor cottage habitable, which, it was understood, was to be done for her."

"And so it shall, poor old lady! I'm sure, if I had known it wanted repair——"

"You were there three times during the last week."

"Was I? I have no recollection of it. I have so much to attend to that it is hard to remember anything. But your recommendation, Miss Lucy——"

"I make no recommendation at all, Mr. Cheek; unless it be a recommendation to remember that you are the hired agent of this property, and not its master."

Mr. Cheek had never entertained a suspicion of

this proud phase of Lucy's character, and almost quailed under it; particularly as it was the precise phase that was most unpropitious to the grand matter in reserve. Any one else would have been discouraged, but Mr. Cheek could not afford to be so. He had screwed up his determination to now or never, and resolutely plunged his foot into a quagmire worse than his own farm-yard.

"Miss Lucy," he protested, "you are angry without a cause, and I cannot let the occasion pass without proving how wholly and devotedly I desire to be your truest friend."

"Sir! I presume you mean servant: my friends are in another sphere."

"Yes; but you must remember that you have not many; and it causes me indescribable pain to know that the few you have must soon become fewer. Be advised, and consider the age and infirmities of Mr. Bloomer, of whom, there is no question, you must be deprived very shortly."

"By your assistance, Mr. Cheek. I have told you I wish to pass on; and, as a civil request is not enough I *desire* you will take your own way and leave me to mine."

"Hey, dey! This is strong!" He exclaimed, with an inadvertent burst of ferocity, which as quickly turned to a burst of expostulation. "My dear young lady, I only wish you to reflect upon what is to become of you when your uncle dies and the living passes into other hands, and the sale of the estate has been effected by the creditors, and I am deprived of the power of ever giving you farther in-

telligence of my dear friend, your excellent father. I have used a word that offends you, but consider how things are changed. Whatever Sir Harry was has long passed away; all he had is in hands it does not satisfy; he is himself hardly driven to keep out of them, whilst I, who have the misfortune to be so looked down upon, am a man of fortune."

"I have no doubt you *now* speak the truth, and it is the first time that ever truth was a disgrace. Boast of your pillage to some one else, and stand away!"

"Now, look you there! Because one person is ruined by extravagance, another cannot prosper without dishonesty! What an answer is that to one who offers all his advantages to your acceptance!"

"How!" Lucy drew herself up like a young Medusa. "What mean you by that?"

"Come, I'm glad you ask me a question, for it shows you more disposed for conversation. I mean exactly what I say; and I think you will allow that you have no need to question how I came by my property when I offer you every farthing of it. I—I am not, perhaps, what you consider your equal in birth. But notwithstanding that, I hold a respectable position as a man of fortune and a magistrate for the county; whilst you, with all your breeding and beauty—I must speak plainly for your own sake—are entirely destitute. Now don't be in a hurry, for matters cannot be mended by anger—unprotected, without resource, lost in a hard-hearted world—what's to become of you? Look at that house in the distance, with its fine park and its fine woods,

and I don't know what. That's Broome Warren Chase. The house in which you were born, and dearer to you, as I have heard you say, than the whole globe around it. If you will share it with me that place shall be yours."

Lucy's eyes were lightened up with a gleam of inspiration.

"The wretch!" she cried out, not addressing him, but, as it seemed, the Powers above them. "The wretch has betrayed himself! The home of my father is mine already. He holds some secret proof of it, and thinks to secure it under the show of generosity. He dares to insult me because he knows my father is dead! Oh, were he living, and but a moment here!"

"And if he were," said Cheek, with the snarl of a wild beast, routed out of his hiding-place, "and if he were, what then? Would you compel me to the revelations you have such mortal cause to dread? Would you pull them down upon your own head? Rage as you will, you are not so mad as that!"

It was well that Lucy had ventured her midnight conversation with Aaron Daunt! It was well that she had asked him what cause she had to fear Mr. Cheek. His assurance had been a treasured comfort to her, and the time was come to prove it.

"Hark you, Mr. Cheek," she replied, with a look of mysterious daring to which she herself could attach no meaning but such as she might detect in his own scared countenance. "Look back, Mr. Cheek, look back upon some past transactions of your life! It may be that I have other information than you

have thought it safe to give me. That you have been forestalled in your revelations."

Her piercing eye followed the random shaft, and saw it struck the mark. "Be ready, Mr. Cheek, I warn you! Be ready for the test of which of us has most cause to dread the other. You with your fiend's calumnies, or I with your evil spirit, *Aaron Daunt!*"

Cheek looked at her, pale and paralyzed, for some moments; and then his courage partially returned. He felt that, had she known all which he suspected Aaron could tell, she would not have spoken in hints. He was likewise sensible that his worst policy was to seem alarmed. But his daring was damped, as appeared in his less confident tone.

"Be cautious, Miss Lucy; be cautious what you do! I can bear much for your sake; but my reputation, if attacked, must be defended, and you know the means I must resort to."

"Resort to them at once; for here, thank God, is Mrs. Toogood come to meet me!"

He turned round in alarm; and sure enough, there was Mrs. Toogood serenely taking her morning walk, with her footman attending her.

"Be cautious!" he repeated, "not a word of what has passed! Not a syllable of anything, or you bring down the whole upon yourself!"

He could say no more, for Mrs. Toogood had perceived that something was wrong and hastened her steps.

"Why, Lucy," she exclaimed, "my dear Lucy, what on earth——"

"Oh, nothing, ma'am, nothing," said Cheek, trembling from head to foot, and trying to laugh it off, "only the remembrance of a tale of distress which was once rather harrowing, but has long passed away. I had better tell you another time, for I had no idea it would have affected Miss Longland so strongly."

"If you please, Mr. Cheek," replied Lucy, "we will have it now—what think you, Mrs. Toogood? This man, who has been distinguished by your confidence—I might almost say by your friendship—has dared to taunt me with my want of protection! Has presumed to practice on my fears of destitution. Has threatened me with vengeance—I am choked with saying it—if I refuse to marry him."

"Mr. Cheek!"

"And defied me, with the last words he spoke, to repeat to *you* one syllable."

Never was worthy lady in greater amazement than Mrs. Toogood.

"Impossible! Mr. Cheek, have you called Miss Longland destitute, when you yourself witnessed the deed by which I gave her ten thousand pounds?"

"Did you do so? Did he know it?"

"Certainly! and knew you were to have it on your marriage."

"Oh, now I see it all! and yet *not* all! There's more—much more—behind! My dear, dear Mrs. Toogood, how little you believed what outrage your generosity would lead to! It was to grasp your bounty, and I know not what besides, that I have been degraded by this ruffian's insolence."

Mrs. Toogood was lost in wonder.

“Have I, then—have I *myself* been so deceived? I am thunderstruck! This, then, was your reason, Mr. Cheek, why my intentions were to be kept secret from all the world, and most of all from Miss Longland!”

The gentleman addressed stood ghastly and grinning, with not a word or a sound but a low chuckle of amusement. At last he burst into a hideous laugh.

“And this is the way,” he cried, “this is the way in which you understand a harmless piece of pleasantry! Would any human being have dreamt I could be in earnest? What, I that could buy the best man in the county thrice over, toss my thousands to the feet of a high and mighty miss who could not condescend to thank me! No, Mrs. Toogood—no, ma’am. Christopher Cheek is too much a man of business for that! What I did was in *your* interest; to try how far the young lady was likely to be grateful for your gifts, as judged by her gratitude to *me*. You see what that is. Nothing could have answered better.”

“Nothing, sir, I grant, to prove all human fallibility, and astound me at my late opinion.”

“Of course, Mrs. Toogood, of course. I ought to have expected nothing better than the thanks which people generally get for serving their friends.”

“Rather say, Mr. Cheek, for miraculous imposition upon them. I have hitherto believed what you said of yourself, and must now, of course, believe what other people say. It is unnecessary to trouble you

further respecting the subject of my note; as, no doubt, my nephew, Mr. Crowley, was perfectly justified in his proceedings, which are the same I shall be under the necessity of directing in any visit with which you may think proper to honour the Rosary. Good morning, sir." With which Mrs. Toogood made him a curtsey that might have swept him out of the Bills of Mortality.

But it only swept away the last shelter behind which he had hoped to plan better operations, and brought him into fuller daylight.

"Ha, ha!" he retorted, scarcely knowing what he said. "It is a pleasure to understand Mrs. Toogood at last after trying so many years in vain. Perhaps, as this is a lucid interval, she may now understand Christopher Cheek."

But Christopher Cheek was left to puzzle out that problem by himself, for Mrs. Toogood had taken the arm of Lucy, and was making her stately progress homeward, the footman only looking back, with his brass-headed staff of office prepared for exigencies. Having, therefore, nobody to instruct, Mr. Cheek's solution of himself was not carried out quite so perspicuously as it might have been, and was only notable for such fragmentary eloquence as people will sometimes soliloquise rather than wisdom should want listeners. But as the fragments which, at that moment, fortified Mr. Cheek and frightened the crows, seemed rather like materials for history, we endeavoured to put one or two of them together. Our first conclusion was that he had a natural turn for mathematics, making it an

axiom that one Cheek was equal to any given number of honest folks, and that a line as crooked as a ram's horn could be prolonged to infinity. Our next was that the stumble of to-day was only to be got over by a stride of equal desperation to-morrow ; when, in consequence of having just been canted over by the stepping-stone, he would have a double distance to cover, with a pretty deep gulf to receive him if he made another mistake.

Having exhausted all imaginary demonstrations of rage and resentment, he scowled his way home to exhibit the result of his great undertaking, which Nelly had foreseen the night before, and to call for his breakfast, with the addition of yesterday's dinner and supper. He looked as if it would be dangerous to speak to him, and eat as if he were devouring his enemies. After which he strode stormily about the house, in preparation for a hasty journey, and then thrust his poor pony into the shafts, and flogged him to the railway.

CHAPTER XIX.

WE have seen that, early on the same morning, Crowley had set out upon his promised expedition to young Lord Goldfield; a circumstance which perhaps prevented him from making a second intrusion upon Mr. Cheek before that gentleman had quite cooled from the first.

The journey lay through London, where he arrived in the afternoon, encouraged by a newspaper, purchased on the road, to hope it might not be necessary to go farther. Some very important races, he found, were to commence on the day following, and he knew, from observations on the sporting portion of his club, that their last arrangements for such events were usually made at some celebrated betting rooms which we need not mention. Nothing in creation was of such consequence as the concluding odds on first favourites, or a few ounces in the weights for the Great Handicap; to say nothing of the scratchings, hedgings, and reported trials, with the hints of the knowing, and the names of the celebrated atoms engaged to ride. And yet the Turf, at the time of which we are writing, was but a

rising business compared with the glorious development which has astounded us more recently. One or two fine sheep had been shorn of their golden fleece, and a joint stock company of Jasons had driven them to bleat in some wilderness out of sight of their natural folds ; but it was sufficiently rare to cause a nine days' wonder, and some commiseration. We are now less given to surprise, and our sensibilities have been drawn upon so deeply that few people have a fraction remaining. We leave wiser heads to carry out our reflections, if they choose, and hope the gallant young rams are learning to look about them at shearing time.

Crowley made his inquiries at Lord Goldfield's hotel, and found he was in town, but not at home. Concluding where he was, which was where he had not himself the privilege of the entrée, he took up the same quarters to wait for him.

The head of the house of Goldfield continued to enjoy the operation of the clippers till a very late hour, when he returned to sum up his triumphs with all the jauntiness of a French poodle that has nothing superfluous left but the tuft at his tail. The information, however, that a gentleman named Crowley was waiting for him seemed a little embarrassing. Not that he had any want of regard for Crowley, whom, on the contrary, he had always liked better than any other friend he possessed, but his own undecided character was so full of weak traits that, though he was wholly unconscious of them, the higher qualities opposed to him always inspired a sensation of reproach. The thoughts and

pursuits which he could discuss freely with others were too aimless and trifling to find sympathy where he would have been most glad of it, and everything beyond them was an exertion in which he was too unpractised to commit himself when he could avoid it. Hence, the life he had been leading and the scene he had just quitted made him apprehensive of being driven to admissions for which he could expect no approval.

His prepossessing appearance, however, and genuine expression of pleasure, together with a shadowy resemblance to both his father and his mother, would have disarmed any disposition to inflict mortification, even had Crowley been less averse to that ordinary mode of reasoning. They shook hands as they had done in times when sagacity could hardly have been expected in either; and no superiority was allowed to appear, except what could not be disguised, and consisted in two or three years of seniority on the part of Crowley. They were soon talking on more equal terms than ever, for the young lord found his favourite themes taken up with an apparently corresponding interest, and reckoned upon the same sort of credit which gratified him so highly from other quarters. His frankness went over the last three years with a pride that left nothing untold, and in terms of vast enjoyment; though, young as he was, there were even now some contractions about his boyish face, just budding forth a pale moustache.

To account for these vestiges of untimely care, Crowley continued to lead him on with inquiries so

complimentary to his acuteness that the poor lad really began to fancy his friend was picking up instructions to qualify himself for the same line of celebrity. Of course he was highly flattered at being the instructor, instead of the lectured, when the pupil was no less than the sensible adviser of whom he had so long stood in awe, and his career of ambition was a long history, all the more pitiable from its enthusiastic simplicity. Though he stood on the verge of ruin, it had evidently never occurred to him that he had been the victim of sharpers, and was in imminent danger of investing in that company an heirloom of more value than all the rest of his patrimony.

"The truth is," he continued, "I have been bitten pretty sharply; but the race course, in some sort, resembles the hunting field, where, if a man means to get forward, he must not mind a few ups and downs, and the cautious rider who cranes over his leaps gets more falls than anyone else; or like the field of battle, where we have good authority for saying that victory is the result of a lucky series of accidents. Now you'll see I shall gain a great one to-morrow, when I stand to win a good many thousands, merely because the handicapper has over-weighted all the best horses. There are but four acceptances, and I have backed Weasel to be first or second, in consequence of a telegram that came this afternoon to tell me that two of them will not start. There's an accident for you! Only two to run, and all the same to me whether I am first or second. A few more such chances and all my losses will be redeemed!"

Crowley was silent for a moment, for it cost him an effort to suppress his indignation at a profit upon private information, which was neither more nor less than a swindle upon the less enlightened. The heedless young man would, no doubt, have been equally shocked if such a thought had struck him, but thinking was not his forte, though it was not the exact time to remind him of it, and discourage farther communications; and it is difficult to prescribe for a patient before we know all the symptoms of his malady. By the same style of examination adopted by the physician in cases of lunacy, Crowley soon discovered something more than symptoms that the present one was hopeless.

"And how," he enquired, "did you gain all this invaluable knowledge? for it seems impossible to have been acquired by your own self-education. You must have been the pupil of able professors?"

"Oh, there's no end of good fellowship in the Ring, and any promising freshman, as we are called at college, is sure to be taken up by all who can help him. I have a great many friends who can turn a spoon into a razor in no time."

"With the fusion of a little baser metal. But does not a certain quantity of the better ore escape in the grinding?"

"Oh, we must all pay for improvements."

"Of course," replied Crowley, coming now to a question most important to himself. "Did you ever happen to benefit by the assistance of, I dare say, an accomplished grinder, called Captain Cox?"

"Cox! Do you know Cox?"

Crowley almost started at the scarcely expected verification of what he had thought possible.

“I know something of him,” he answered, “but have not the advantage of his acquaintance. You are more fortunate, I perceive.”

“The best fellow in the world! It was Cox who sent me the telegram to-day, and recommended me to lay it on heavily with two or three fellows who were anxious to bet against Weasel. I have booked them, and no mistake.”

“And they, I suspect, with no mistake, have booked you. Now, my dear Harry of Goldfield, mind what I tell you—this Cox is a finished rogue.”

“What, Cox! Why he’s the best friend I have. Spends half his time with me. Looks after my stud, instructs me how to lay out my money, and finds me as much as I want, in emergencies.”

“Indeed! And where does he find it?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Of some old Jew, I believe, named Moses Pinhorn. But all in his own name; so you must not think me at all compromised with that set—Cox takes care of that—the most obliging, disinterested,—why, you will hardly believe, he bought me this two years’ old, that is going to win me so much to-morrow, for a mere trifle of two thousand, when he might have bought him for himself and sold him for twice as much. I know it to be a fact, because I have it upon the best authority.”

“Aye? And what authority is that?”

“Why, he told me so himself!”

“I thought so.”

The noble Earl began to resume the embarrassed expression, and Crowley continued.

“ Now do not think me unkind or meddlesome if I make a few frank remarks upon what you have told me, and a few prophecies of what will be the event. In the first place, can you believe that people who live upon the inexperience of others—your spoon grinders—can have any inducement but the dust of the said spoon, or that their good fellowship endures one moment after the spoon is transformed and becomes as sharp as themselves ? That the phœnix of to-day, in other words, will meet with the same worship when he is the jackdaw of tomorrow, unless he learns to be a better thief than his teachers ? No doubt the Turf has many spotless votaries, and as long as they confine themselves to its fair contests we have no right to find fault with them ; but the betting ring is formed from another class—the barnacles that stick to a fine ship, and must, if they are not scraped off, eventually sink it. What distinction can you draw between the cheat who overlooks your cards, and his counterpart who spies into the secrets of your stable ? True, the last rogue enjoys an immunity because he happens to be in fashion, and because his reproach is lost in his partnership with a legion ; but to whom is it lost except to those who share it ? I am grieved that you did not consult your better feelings before you made those bets you speak of, and confess I shall think you more fortunate in losing than in winning them. That you will lose them I have no doubt, or that you have made them with the agents of this best fellow in

the world, Captain Cox ; whose great friendship will not admit of his robbing you more openly.”

“Cox !”

“Yes, Cox. Tell him I said so, when he tears his hair at the false information upon which he wrote his telegram. Tell him when he puts in his claim for moneys lent upon more than Shylock’s interest ; when the auctioneer’s hammer is echoing through the halls of your fathers, and the treasures that are not entailed are offered to the competition of Jew brokers. When the portraits of your noble father and mother are about to be transferred to an exhibition in Wardour Street ; and your cheap bargain of the famous Weasel is sold a little cheaper to the cart of a costermonger. Forgive me if my words are strong, for I am thinking of your fond and troubled mother, whom I left yesterday in a state which, I bless God, was never the state of mine.”

“My mother !” exclaimed Lord Goldfield, who was not too reckless to remember what a mother she was. “She is not ill ?”

“She is what I hope you will think worse. She is unhappy.”

“Good heavens ! From what cause ?”

“From the cause which you have given her. She says you have estranged yourself, because you have chosen friends unworthy of your high station, and pursuits which have changed your nature—pursuits of which you are already feeling the consequence. I left her in deep grief, and looking forward to nothing less than the ruin and degradation of a house which has been honoured for many centuries ; and

have come to you, at her desire, to remind you that you are her only son and the last hope of your family."

"My dear Crowley," was the confused reply, "I am very sorry—yes—amazingly shocked—indeed I am—that my dear mother should have taken up such erroneous fancies; but mothers, you know, are always conjuring up chimeras which never—that is, very seldom—prove to be anything more than shadows—the merest shadows. It is only because mine is the best of mothers, that I have ever hesitated to tell her everything. You say yourself that you see no harm in racing for amusement; and, upon my life, I never had any other motive! How could I, with a fortune above every want in the world? For mere amusement—that's all! But I need not tell you that, if a man only goes out partridge-shooting, how certain his mother is that, some day or other, he must needs shoot himself. How she never sees an old woman with a faggot on her back, but she is quite sure it is the body of her son with his head blown off. That's the reason—nothing else! And as for Cox, and the rest of my friends, you would like them amazingly, if you only knew them. As for the telegram—you don't understand—I didn't explain. It was only because some wolves have got into our fold, and we had no other means of making them disgorge what they have devoured. That's the true state of the case, and you will do me the greatest favour imaginable if you will only convince my mother of it. If that doesn't satisfy her, I promise you, as soon as I have won the Leger,

which is a dead certainty, and will make me as square as a parallelogram, I will sell my stud and cut racing altogether."

"And if you should lose it? What then?"

"Why, then," replied Lord Goldfield—his countenance confessing he would have no choice—"I will cut it all the same: I will, I promise you."

Crowley tried hard to learn the extent of his losses, but this was not possible, for he did not know it himself; and just then a waiter entered to say that two gentlemen had called for my lord, and said there was no time to lose. He also delivered a letter which had been brought by a messenger.

"By George!" said my lord, "I didn't know how late it was. I must wish you good-night!"

"Why, where are you going, at near one o'clock? I thought you meant to sleep here."

"So I thought myself; but these fellows want to be upon the Heath before daylight to see the last gallops, and we have taken a special train."

As he said this, he broke open the letter, which was very short, but seemed vexatious.

"No bad news, I hope," said Crowley; "only to tell you that the two horses have changed their minds, and mean to start, after all."

"No, not so bad as that; but provoking, nevertheless. Cox is called up to town upon particular business, and won't be at the race. I reckoned upon taking the first step to comfort my dear mother, and telling him to make no more bets for me. What the deuce could have brought him up here at such a time?"

"A little disinclination, perhaps, to see your face and hear your remarks when the race is over. But it cannot be helped. I am delighted with your intentions; which, for fear he should know them too late, I shall be only too happy to convey to him myself."

"No—will you? Upon my life, you will do me a great favour! Here is the address he writes from; but he is sure not to be long there; he is wanted in so many quarters, and is so indispensable everywhere, that he has no fixed residence."

"Not for his racing establishment?"

"Oh, he has no horses but the one he rides. He has no time for that. His racing establishment is all in his book, and only runs second to the 'Court Guide.'"

"And neck-and-neck with the 'Newgate Calendar.' He bets upon commission?"

"Just so. And, as I have promised, I'll not give him another. You'll find him a charming fellow. Mention my name and he'll do anything for you. Good-night. Pray say everything you can to comfort my mother; and, rely upon it this shall be my last journey to Newmarket."

"I think it very likely," was the answer, in foreboding terms; and they took a hasty, but very cordial leave, though it was grave on one side, and nervous and flurried on the other.

It had not been a very encouraging conference to report to Lady Goldfield, but, woeful as the plight of her son appeared to be, there was an indication of something better in his resolutions, if he could

only keep them. To Crowley himself the success had been miraculous, for though he had certainly foreseen some chance of obtaining a few particulars in the history of Captain Cox in a quarter so attractive to such birds of prey, the last thing he could have dreamt of was the honour of his personal acquaintance. How it could be turned to account was a subject of debate amongst all the wits he could summon ; but that it should be so turned he promised himself and Captain Cox too. Whether the worthy beldaims who are good enough to spin our destinies might take it into their heads to chequer it with malign threads, after beginning so well, he did not trouble himself to doubt—self-reliance seldom does ; and, when it finds the old ladies disposed to be crotchety, has very often the faculty of twirling the spindle its own way.

CHAPTER XX.

CROWLEY was early the next morning on his road to Captain Cox, whose address was at no great distance from his hotel, so that he had good hopes of arriving before it was time to awaken aristocratic clients with the "latest intelligence." But in coming to the house he could hardly believe it was the residence of Lord Goldfield's estimable friend; for though the upper portion presented a flashy exterior, the basement was fitted up for a public betting office. Was it possible that the conjurations of racing wizards could establish a community between the frequenters of such a place and the highly cultivated exotics of Belgravia? And yet it was traceable from end to end, and not very circuitously.

Truly, thought Crowley, as he passed through a little mob assembled round the entrance, the influence of the turf must be highly satisfactory to politicians who have, time out of mind, reproached the upper ten thousand with standing too much aloof from the lower million. Here are footmen, grooms, and my lady's page, preparing with book

and pencil to stake their wages against the lords who pay them. Here are 'prentice boys, with ventures from their masters' tills, to be replenished by their winnings; here is every variety of fool secure of making a fortune by his wits; every grade of roguery going in for its little-go in the deep study of follow-my-leader, all certain of taking honours, and all fellow-commoners of one unlimited college, of which the heads are distinguished by coronets, and a great many of the tails by decorations from the House of Correction.

Passing through this studious assembly he presented himself before the chair of a professor, a knavish-looking fellow, seated behind a crowded counter, blandly busy in the register of deposits from two or three consequential flunkies.

"I shall be happy to attend to you, sir," he said, "when I have accommodated these gentlemen." And turning to a powdered head and wilderness of whisker, he resumed their consultation over the card of the day. "What say you, sir, to the handicap? A good thing that! Two to one on my lord's colt going a-begging. Suppose we say three to one? A sure win!"

"I don't seem to patronise my lord's stable," demurred whiskers, very sagaciously. "What do you think, Joseph? You are a judge, you are."

"I am," responded that infallible gentleman. "Is that colt a horse or a mare?"

"Suffer me an instant, gentlemen," said Crowley. "I can safely assure you the colt is not a mare. I only wish to know if Captain Cox is here?"

"Captain Cox!" replied knave, turning round more attentively, and with all deference to the superior style of the enquirer. "Yes, sir,—my lord, I should say; Captain Cox is up-stairs, but very busy just now, with Lord Charles and the Markis. Would your lordship please to do anything in the cup or the handicap, till he is disengaged?"

"No, I thank you. I shall see Captain Cox, which I believe is the same thing."

"Quite, my lord; certainly; and perhaps they may have gone out by the private door. I'll ask his servant, my lord." And he tingled a bell which brought an imp of a groom boy. The distinguished visitors were gone, and Crowley's card was taken up and immediately answered by a polite message that Captain Cox would be very happy to see him.

He was conducted through a side door into a spacious entrance hall, with a handsome flight of steps to apartments of suitable reception for aristocratic intimates. The Captain was elegantly got up in morning attire, after the manner of the *creme de la creme* which he had the honour of skimming, though there were some exceptions to his successful imitation of high *ton*; such as a strong aroma of cigars, and a plentiful supply of low sporting papers, which, however popular they may be in some lordly circles, are generally reserved for more private edification. There were likewise many choice samples of coloured prints on the walls, gorgeously framed, and representing great events

on the verdant road to ruin, and portraits of skinned rabbits in buckskins and jockey caps, and a variety of noble patrons, better known in Israel than anywhere else.

The Captain himself was no exception to the exceptions, for though he rose from his lounging chair with a condescending urbanity, adopted from some finished model, he was not so far different from Nelly's description and Crowley's own nocturnal observation, but the natural slangy familiarity was traceable in the borrowed phraseology of Lord Charles and the Marquis. Imitations may always be detected in the best copies we have of another art, and everybody knows that what is frankness in one man is very often sheer impudence in another.

"Amazing happy, Mr. Crowley," he began, "to make your acquaintance. I am intimate with a good many members of your club, but I believe this is the first time we have met. Pray sit down, and take a cigar."

"Thank you, I am not a smoker."

"Perhaps you will excuse me, for I can't get on without it. You left town a little while ago, I heard, and as my friends seldom leave it for any reason but one, if I can do anything in the way of accommodation, you have only to command me. No security, you know; we never talk of that, or, if you are thinking of a turn upon the Heath, say the word, and perhaps I can help you."

"Well, Captain Cox, to say the truth I have been thinking a little about it, and have come up to town

on purpose to hear what is going on. It must, no doubt, be a field of very interesting amusement, when our friends think of nothing else, and we all want amusement sometimes. I should not mind trying it for once, with a loose hundred or two, and if I were successful, there would be no objection to risking my winnings; but a mistake at starting would be discouraging."

"Quite right. Secure the first step, and no fear for the next. Here's a dead certainty for to-day."

"So I have heard. On Lord Goldfield's horse for the handicap?"

"No, no, not *on* him, for then the first step would be a stumble. Everybody thought as you do, ten minutes ago, because Goldfield had been laying it on like a mad man. He is a great friend of mine, but green as a young gooseberry. He won't take advice, and so he always goes wrong, and what's worse for *me*, he tells everybody he goes by my direction. I never can convince him that the best horse has no chance against the best judge, and is no more to be trusted than the best army with the worst general. I grieve to say it is all up with him, for he has nothing left to lose, and I really must decline having anything more to do with his speculations."

Crowley was shocked to find things so much worse than he thought, but glad it was not necessary to deliver his message, and alarm the Captain's caution. If he did not think this advisable, he could hardly be found fault with by the rat that

deserts the sinking ship in which he has himself gnawed the leak.

“Well,” resumed Cox, “I told you how things had altered ten minutes ago. The reason is this ; two horses engaged in the handicap decided not to start, and were reserved for the next race ; but their owners have found that by taking Goldfield’s bets, they could make it the best venture of the two, and so they both come to the post, and must leave him nowhere. If he wins, I’ll pay your loss. Lay your first hundred against him, and I’ll send the proceeds wherever you like, and there will be a good omen for the future.”

So, thought Crowley, this is the morsel that baits the trap ! He had as little doubt that the withdrawal of the two horses—both, of course, belonging to gentlemen of the first character, and intimate friends of Captain Cox—was another trap, set in ambush for the green gooseberry, and would have made the bet to any extent that he might restore the mangled victim that much of his substance ; but Cox’s business was to propose nothing alarming, and so he booked a rich client against his ruined friend, and then, “to save trouble,” he added, “I may as well pay you now, because, as I tell you, the thing is certain. Here it is,” and he handed a clean smooth note for a hundred pounds. “That’s the way we do business. No receipt or bother of any kind, all upon honour. If I prove a false prophet for the first time, you can send it back, you know. So you needn’t hesitate.”

This matter being so cleverly settled to the satisfac-

tion of both parties, the fast tongue of the Captain, ridden by a brain that could not hold it, took a gallop through clouds of Olympic dust, that almost blinded himself, for ranging over an endless region of dead certainties, which might be backed either before or *after* the respective events, and turning into a hundred high roads to celebrity, that led anywhere but upward, amongst trainers and jockies who were the most honest fellows in the world *to their orders*—noble friends who were cleaned out (not a bit too soon), splendid studs that were coming to the hammer for nothing at all (to be sold for what they were worth)—ranging so rapidly, he rather lost his reckoning, and, in the end, rewarded Crowley's polite attention by a slight turn in the wrong course, which was just the one laid out for him.

"I shall have a rare thing," he went on, through the puffs of his cigar, "for the Cambridgeshire, if I can see you a day or two before; but I'm not sure whereabouts you'll find me. I'll write to your club, for I'm a good deal taken up about an estate in the country, in which I am thinking of making a good investment. There are a good many incumbrances, and I've some misgivings about the title."

"Almost always the case," observed Crowley, as calmly as he could. "I have experienced many such difficulties in purchases of my own, and if I can help you as you would help me, I shall be only too happy."

"Oh, I believe I am getting over them. The worst is a plaguy girl, who stands in the way, and might make all sure."

"Perhaps that may not be so great a difficulty."

"I understand. Well, I'm not a married man yet; but there's no knowing what I may be, for she's confounded handsome, and if everything else fails—I don't know—I've a sharp looker-out down there, and expect a letter at my solicitor's this morning." Here he looked at his watch, and was surprised. "By Jove, you must excuse me! I shall be too late for my appointment," and hastily changing his exquisite dressing-gown for a coat of transcendent fashion, he had only time to repeat his advice about the Cambridgeshire, and promise ten thousand for the outlay of Goldfield's last hundred.

The abrupt close of the visit was a cruel flaw in the wind which had set so fair; but there was something more to be done yet. They descended together to the street, where Cox hailed a passing cab, and, with a very friendly good morning, directed the driver to a particular number in New Boswell Court, Lincoln's Inn.

This was the strangest incident of the morning, for it was the very place to which Crowley himself was going; being the office of a certain Mr. Badger, solicitor of Sir Harry Longland, of whose address he had possessed himself on the night of his walk with Miss Lightfoot, for the purpose of consulting him upon their conversation. It seemed at first a wonderful coincidence, but was, in reality, none at all, excepting the coincidence of time; for nothing was more likely than an application to the family lawyer for information on those subjects on which Cheek had been so mysterious.

A moment's reflection decided him that it would be best to let Cox have his interview without interruption; and not to seek his own till Mr. Badger was in condition to compare notes with him. He determined, therefore, to return to his hotel for the next hour, and employ the first moments of it in writing to Lord Goldfield, whom he might yet be in time to save from some fresh folly.

He found from the waiter that there was an immediate conveyance for his letter, Lord Goldfield's servant being just about to follow his master with the travelling equipments which in the hasty departure had been left behind. The contents of the letter, in which was included the hundred pound note of which Cox had been so liberal, may be guessed, and in less than half an hour the messenger was on his way by express.

As soon as he thought he might venture, he ordered a cab to take him to Mr. Badger's, resolving after that, to pay a visit to Moses Pinhorn, whose name had been casually dropped the night before, to ascertain for Lady Goldfield the amount of her son's debts, and discourage farther accommodation.

CHAPTER XXI.

WE have now to climb a dark and creaking staircase which gives no gleam of an ending, and, therefore, we presume, the most appropriate mode of access to the law.

Wedged in a table, creaking with a legal chaos, and with an incised half moon to admit him, sat a stout old snuff-coloured gentleman; his back against four stories of Japan cases, inscribed, like tombstones, with the names of those whose substance they contained, and his chin upon his crossed hands, in something like the attitude of the Sphinx. Opposite to him sat Captain Cox, reading the letter he had expected, and ruffled much beyond his ordinary impassible expression, for he often broke into brief exclamations against his own want of caution, and the want of honesty in somebody else. When he had finished, he crumpled his news into his pocket, and turning impatiently to Mr. Badger, asked if he knew anything of a fellow named Crowley.

“I cannot say I ever saw him,” replied the lawyer, rather dryly, “but I know him to be a

gentleman of the best fellowship in London, or anywhere else."

"Do you know anything of his having taken a house of Miss Longland?"

"Yes; a month ago."

"Then why the deuce did you never tell me?"

"Because it has nothing to do with Broome Warren, and I didn't see how it concerned you."

"By Jove! but it does though, and he knows it. I have just seen him, and he didn't say a word about it."

"That, I suppose, was because he thought as I do."

"I doubt he's a sharp fellow, that Crowley; and I cannot quite tell what he is thinking about; but it was not what he pretended. He knew more than I told him—I'll swear to that—and came for I don't know what."

"What *could* he come for? There's nothing you wish to hide, is there? We are all above board, ain't we?"

"Of course!" and the Captain made a short pause to bite his nails. It might have occurred to him that he had said a little too much about the plaguy girl who stood in the way to a clear title to the estate he had talked of. After he had finished his nails, he pulled out his letter again, and re-read some parts with more satisfaction; asking with an angry laugh, whether Mr. Badger had heard anything of Cheek lately.

"Not since the rents were due; he's always better engaged then."

"I hope he thinks so! You tell me you have bought up all Sir Harry's creditors."

"Not all; but all that have any security upon Broome Warren, and made a good bargain; upon the assurance, remember, that you make yourself sole creditor only for the purpose of preventing a sale of it and for securing it still to the name of the family. Little more than a name, I fear; but one that I have good reason to feel for. I'm glad that you have also, though you have never explained why."

"Oh! that's a long story. How came the creditors not to pay themselves by selling it long ago?"

"Because it was not to be sold during Sir Harry's life, and we have never heard that he is dead. Besides, he was much beloved, and nobody was inclined to be hard upon him."

"Aye, only upon the memory of Uncle Downton! Well, that's *his* concern. And all the claims are now centred in me, as well as all the sums reserved by Cheek for repairs he never made, and a thousand other things which you can prove to be swindles quite as bad."

"All of them."

"Then, by the Lord Harry, he had best take care of himself!"

Here the discussion was interrupted by a clerk with the card of another visitor.

"Odd enough!" said the old gentleman, raising his head like a worthy house-dog that scents mischief. "Here is Cheek himself!"

The Captain was more excited.

“See him, by all means ; but let us hear his business before he knows mine.”

“Good. Show Mr. Cheek in.”

Mr. Cheek’s eye first fell upon Mr. Badger, to whom he tendered his hand with a smile of confidence, like a man who feels that his business invests him with some importance ; but Mr. Badger only poked out his forefinger, a little unwillingly, because he knew Mr. Cheek’s five were always the teeth of a trap.

“How d’ye do, Mr. Badger ; hope I see you well.”

“Thank ‘ee,—same to you.”

“How are you, Cheek ?” said Cox, in his careless manner, and with a smile of some irony at his friend’s astonishment.

“What ! Captain Cox ! Why, who’d have thought of seeing *you* here !”

“Not you, I dare say. What brings you to London ?”

“Well, it is something that wouldn’t wait ; and so I came up by the night train.”

“Indeed ! Go about it as fast as you like. My affairs will stand by till yours are done ; and then I shall have a pleasant talk with you.”

Cheek did not quite like the look of his friend, but as there was no getting rid of him, he could only be delighted.

“But who’d have thought of your being a client of Mr. Badger ?”

“Aye ; very odd, ain’t it.” And he turned to a

bleared window to study the natural history of the spider.

Mr. Cheek twitched up his trousers to raise that part which people usually sit upon, and placed himself in one of the wooden arm-chairs ; holding fast by his knees, and squeezing his hat between them, as if he felt he might squeeze more out of that than his head ; for, pressing as he had declared his business to be, he hardly knew how to begin it.

“ Come with the Midsummer rents, I suppose ?” said Mr. Badger, to relieve him. “ Michaelmas almost due.”

“ Why, no,” replied Cheek, regretfully, “ I can’t say I am. It is a hard matter to collect them. The land is bad, and the tenants are worse. Sir Harry is too kind a landlord, and won’t let me give them notice to quit. I hope he’ll some day see his error.”

“ Hope so too.”

“ I’m as great a loser as he is, in proportion to our positions. My per-cent-age, as agent, has dwindled down to a mere nothing.”

“ Like to give up the agency, perhaps ?”

“ Why, not exactly that, you see ; I’ve held it for a good many years, and it has become a habit which would be a loss to me.”

“ Dare say.”

“ It is very disheartening to lay out so much money in repairs, and to see everything going to rack and ruin as soon as it is done. If you were to

look at the roofs I covered in last year, you wouldn't believe I had put a tile on them."

"Dare say."

"Such tenants give the very neighbourhood a bad name. There's that once pretty little property, called Oakendell, has been dropping to pieces for want of somebody to occupy it."

"Why couldn't you keep that in repair?"

"Quite impossible. You know it is a separate concern from Broome Warren Chase, and not comprised in the settlement with the creditors, so that I could make no deduction for it. If it belonged to me I shouldn't mind laying out what little I can afford. It isn't worth much, and I can get no offer for it, which grieves me sadly, because it is the only provision for Sir Harry's daughter. I dare say you remember he wished me to sell it for her?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I don't see any chance—unless—for I do pity the poor young lady—unless I buy it myself; and that, in fact, is the purpose of my being here to-day."

"Glad to hear it. What says Sir Harry?"

"Oh, he tells me to do what I think best for her."

"Umph. Where is he?"

"Wandering about. He has always the same reason for keeping out of sight."

"He has nothing to fear. The creditors have no desire to meddle with him. He's not dead, is he?"

People say he must have been dead these dozen years."

"I dare say they'd be glad to prove it, for then, you know, they might come upon me for the yearly allowance I was ordered to pay him from the estate."

"Yes—a pretty round sum, by this time. But you are come to buy Oakendell. What do you mean to give? It was valued at fifteen thousand."

"Aye; twenty years ago. It is a dear purchase now at five."

"Well; I know nothing about it, except that I hold the title-deeds. You are Sir Harry's man of confidence. Five thousand, you say?"

"Five thousand is all I have to give. I know I am doing a foolish thing, but I have no heart to see Sir Harry's daughter so badly off, and I feel it a pleasure to make the sacrifice. I have brought the five thousand with me."

"Where is it?"

"Here." And he took a roll of notes from his pocket. "Count them, and see that all's right."

Badger took them with great readiness, and counted them out. After scrutinising every one of them against the light, and taking down the numbers, he drew out a receipt, and regarded Mr. Cheek with a grim approach to a smile.

"Is it all right, Mr. Badger?"

"Notes are all right." There was a slight emphasis on the word "notes," which seemed to imply that something else was all wrong.

"Then I shall take possession to-morrow."

"How can that be? The place is let for a twelve-month."

Mr. Cheek looked surprised. How did the lawyer know it was let?

"How? Why, I heard it from the farmers, who have all been here to complain that you won't stop the water through their roofs, though you have stopped the money for it. They say Mr. Crowley has turned out your pigs, and made the house fit for Christians; and, besides that, he has raised the rent a hundred a-year, and paid it in advance."

"I have never received a shilling?"

"No, but Miss Longland has. Mr. Philpot delivered it into her own hand, and was too happy to help talking about it. Three hundred a year, which is just twice the interest of your offer; and so, I think, you counted on a decent bargain."

"I don't care what they have been doing amongst themselves. The place is not let—not a bit of it! Nobody could let it but the agent, or without a written agreement; and I have neither seen nor signed anything of the kind. There's a person, named Crowley, lately gone into it without my authority, and I mean to turn him out; which, as I have purchased it over his head, I can do as soon as I please. What can he do against the title-deeds?"

"Aye; but you haven't got them yet; and, as they were entrusted to me by Sir Harry, you can't expect me to give them up without his order. It won't take long, you know. You are acquainted with his whereabouts, though nobody else is, and

can write to him now. There's pen and ink before you."

"How do I know he has not moved? It may be months before I get his answer! What's to prevent your giving me the deeds in the meantime?"

"Can't!" And the word was too forcible to dispute.

"Can't!" repeated Cheek. "Why, then, I must write; and, whilst the answer is coming, you must hand me back the five thousand."

"Can't!" said the Sphinx again, more forcibly than before. "I've just made out the accounts against you, in behalf of the creditors."

"Creditors! What do I care for the creditors? I didn't come for them!"

"No, no; we know that. I'll tell you what you came for. You are old soldier enough to know that no agent for a property can buy it of himself and for himself, and came here to invest me with an authority which I have not got, and which you can't give me. You must wait till we hear from Sir Harry. In the meantime, I tell you, I have made out the account for the creditors, and find you have stopped sums against them for repairs you have never made, and defalcations of tenants who have likewise never made them, to the amount of a great many thousands. These notes will go but a small way to cover them; but a little is better than nothing, and so to the creditors they must go."

Cheek looked white with alarm, and could no longer restrain his bluster, which burst out in large drops upon his forehead.

"Why, how's this? What d'ye mean? Ain't a man to have what he has paid for, or his money either? Haven't you got it in your hand, and isn't this your receipt?"

"Yes, but you haven't read it yet."

He read it in dismay. It was a receipt for five thousand pounds, in part payment of a larger sum, due, as before-said.

"What!" roared Mr. Cheek, trying to jump up from his arm-chair, which held him fast by the hips, and jumped up with him. "D'ye mean to rob me?" And on went his hat, as the hat of an injured man sometimes does, with a bang on the crown which nearly stove it in. But the lawyer was not at all disturbed; and Captain Cox, who had been amusing himself with a low whistle, whistled louder and louder, with a quaver in the tone, as if he were laughing very merrily.

"Music has charms to soothe a savage breast;" but not always; for it did not seem to have a soothing effect on the breast of his worship, who swore a series of maledictions on the whole world, if he did not bring his case before every court it contained.

"Hope you will, but 'fraid you won't," was the cool comment; "for then, you know, you'd have to give us a great deal more."

But his Worship declined listening, and rounded off a stupendous period with a resolution to call a meeting of the creditors the next day to denounce Mr. Badger for laying hands on five thousand pounds which they were never meant to receive.

"Yes, they are," was another cool assurance, "and I mean to call you as my witness. Here are all the creditors standing behind you, and you shall see me pay them." With which he held out the bank notes to Captain Cox, who now came forward, and conveyed them to his breeches pocket.

"Thanks, Cheek," he said, "this is just what I want for next settling day. Another instalment as soon as you can, old fellow. Why, what makes you stare? You have not heard, perhaps, that I have bought up all the debts for the pleasure of receiving your future payments. Pleasant, ain't it, amongst friends?"

As Cheek was too much astounded to answer, the Captain took advantage of his stranded position to pour in a good broadside.

"You are on your way, no doubt, to report progress at Broome Warren Vicarage; but, don't fatigue yourself, because I have had reports already. I really am confounded sorry for you, for Mrs. Toogood was a shocking bad friend to lose, and the young one was such a specimen of sugared wormwood that I fear you are not likely to forget the taste. Take a friend's advice before you try it on again, and remember that, though *they* might be ashamed to talk of you, there's no trusting a footman with a long stick. Oh, you *do* remember something about it I see! How is Mrs. Rokins, and how is little Sukey, and how are your ears, and how is all the rest of you? A strongish fellow, that Crowley, isn't he? Buy him up! Turn him out! Send him to kingdom come! Nobody wants a neighbour who shakes him

out of his shoes ! Bless my heart ! you look as if I had garotted you ! Never mind, old fellow ; only see you make haste to pay up, for law-suits are expensive, and I should be sorry to send you to prison. I should, indeed, rascal as you are !”

It is no doubt unpleasant to be found out, and a great aggravation to be laughed at.

“ Rascal,” thundered Mr. Cheek, with another broadside. “ *You* talk of rascals ? You that the thief upon the gibbet would honour too much with his last kick ! Rascal ! a fair reproach for giving rascality so long a tether ! Wait but a little while, and we’ll see which has the best right to call the other a rascal ! Look at him, you Badger ! Make the most of him while you can ! Pluck him before he moults ! Rip out the golden egg before it is laid at another door ! Ha ! bless my heart ! you look as if I had garotted you !”

There certainly was something of that effect produced, but it quickly gave place to the cool bantering of the professor, who had studied roguery in all its branches ; and his answer puzzled the lawyer as much as the previous menace.

“ Another door, old fellow ?” he retorted, “ and whose door is that ? Can you tell me where it is ? and whether you may not have to thank me for providing you with one ; barred, bolted, and studded with spike-heads ? I shouldn’t wonder if I were to do you that good turn before you expect it. I ought to have done it years ago, but when people are well off they are apt to forget their obligations,

and I was under very particular ones to you—hey? Go home and think of that; and bring us your swindlings—every farthing, mind. You had better not forget!"

The altercation went on with not much prospect of a close, and Mr. Badger watched its varied eruptions with a momentary hope of some result more luminous than smoke. But he was disappointed. Both the hot element and the cool confined their mysteries to each other; and the smoke would have been nothing else but for an accidental spark which gave it a partial blaze. At the moment in which it was most wanted, the clerk re-entered with the card of Mr. James Crowley.

"Show him in," said the old gentleman, unheard by the disputants, who were too intent upon their quarrel; and extricating himself from his arm-chair and half-moon, he met him at the door as a welcome substitute for a police-constable.

Crowley would rather have gone away and returned when the battle was over, but saw he might be wanted, only requesting that the clerk might turn to his Directory for the address of Mr. Moses Pinhorn. Moses Pinhorn! the enquiry seemed odd from such a visitor; but the clerk, who had gone to his own quarter, was ordered aloud to find Mr. Crowley the address of Moses Pinhorn.

Astonishing! That name was a charm that lulled the storm in an instant, and when Crowley entered the room the only sign of collision was that both gentlemen were taken very much a-back. It was

evident that neither of them was prepared or proof against the heavy hand of the Jew. The best protection, however, against many sorts of peril is not to appear conscious of them ; and so Cheek wiped his head, as usual, with his red cotton handkerchief, and Cox was charmed with the surprise of meeting his new friend again, and hearing what near neighbours they would be in the country. The most agreeable surprise that ever was !

But as conversations between parties who know too much of each other are somewhat barren of materials, the Captain soon recollect ed another pressing appointment for himself and his friend Cheek. There is nothing like a community of danger to make people friends ! Throw the two greatest enemies you know, cheek by jowl, into a horse-pond, and they hug one another to the death. After a few more civilities in the vein of those prophets who give you “the tip” to fortune for the inclosure of twelve stamps, he took another familiar leave, accompanied—without that ceremony—by the friend for whom he had engaged to find a door, bolted and barred and studded with spike-heads. Their appointment, however, was at no greater distance than down stairs to the court-yard, where they had another bout of their quarrel and vanished at the opposite ends.

Crowley now disburthened himself of his long story, which embraced every particular that in any way concerned Lucy from the commencement of our history ; in return for which he received an account,

quite as minute, of all that was known to Mr. Badger; and then came their conclusions, which we may make more brief and free from repetition by dropping the dialogue. Here were two semi-transparent sinners who possessed, or thought they possessed, a knowledge of some great claims on the part of Lucy, of which it was impossible to conjecture the nature, though there was great reason to suppose it known to Moses Pinhorn. And who was Moses? Another, and a more impervious sinner. Mr. Badger knew a great deal about him, but had no personal acquaintance, and represented him as the mildest, meekest, and most wily of that tribe who live on the best blood of the heedless. He also remembered something more to the present point; for, in past times, when he was professionally employed for Sir Harry, he had heard that Moses was solicitor to the late Mr. Downton, and also his intimate friend; which made it very probable that he afterwards became the intimate of Downton's nephew and successor, Captain Cox, which, indeed, had been made apparent by their joint good offices for Lord Goldfield. More than this, he knew that Cheek, in the time of Sir Harry's troubles, had often been sent to negotiate with Mr. Pinhorn, and thought it likely that, being a kindred spirit, he might have established an understanding which still continued. Thus it might be that whatever help was hidden in Moses might require a deep sea line and a strong grapple to be dragged out of him.

"Leave him to me, Mr. Crowley. Don't you go near him; for whilst we are talking he is being prepared to receive you. Aaron Daunt, the servant of Downton, and so hardly used by Cox, is much more to our purpose. He has promised, you say, to go back to Broome Warren, and with him there is no knowing what you may not do. He has something very strange to say, and so it seems has Miss Longland. Learn what you can, and let me hear it. You shall also hear what I do with Moses; but it will not be very soon.

"For Lord Goldfield, he must not pay a farthing of his debts till we look into them. I doubt if Moses will dare the exposure of a law-suit. If he does, his character appears against him; if he does not, he proclaims it himself; and upon the horns of this dilemma he may choose to maintain his probity by tossing his two friends. It is well that the young lord and the young lady are in the toils of the same hands, for the same effort may cut the meshes for both. Lawyers might think us too ready to build upon shadows, but as we have nothing better to build on, we must lay our plans upon these. At all events, shadows will be better comfort for Lady Goldfield than none at all, and I hope she will bear up till we have something more substantial."

The old gentleman had taken up his case with so much earnest intelligence that Crowley had little left to say, and felt relieved of much of the pain with which he had been about to return home.

His expedition, he was sanguine enough to believe, had at least been productive of good promise; and having prolonged his consultation to the last minute he could afford with a chance of seeing Goldsworthy that night, he took his leave.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT was night before Mr. Cheek returned home, and here it was not his fortune to find anything very tranquillizing.

In the course of the morning, Nelly's little brother, Tom Dabchick, had run in with loud complaints of his treatment at the hands of Mrs. Bloomer, who had missed Jim Crow, and made his ears responsible. She had likewise levied upon him the heavy fine of his breakfast. Such an appeal to the independent temper of Nelly from the only object that reconciled her to her poor miserable life was enough to enrage her the most of the two, considering how long her own provocations had put her patience to a dangerous test. Her first impulse was to rush out, and pay a return visit to the ears of Mrs. Bloomer; but as the greatest portion of Tom's affliction was hunger, she postponed that act of etiquette to set him down in Mr. Cheek's arm-chair before the leavings of yesterday's triple breakfast. In disposing of this, the young gentleman soon mixed up his wrath with his eggs and bacon, and swallowed all together; and by the time he had left

nothing to remove but the luggage thus carefully packed up, Nelly had found leisure to resolve on proceedings more pacific. She had given Mr. Cheek a sort of notice that, as soon as the blackberries were ripe, she had thoughts of changing her situation, and had likewise expressed her disapproval of little brother Tom's; and here was a good occasion for taking leave without its painful ceremony.

"Well, Tommy," she said, "I've been thinking what we had best do, and I'll tell you what it is. We were never so happy as when we wandered about the forest, and this is just the time of year to go wandering again."

"No! will you though?" replied the boy, brightening with joy. "But when?"

"Now, Tommy."

"What, to-day?"

"Yes, as soon as I have packed up."

"Hooray! No more of Mother Bloomer, then! And I hope the next chap she leathers will give her as good as she brings. Now we shall hunt the squirrels again, and grope out the rabbits, and light our fire under the old oak tree, and be sung to sleep by the howlets and wild cats, just as we used to be."

Nelly was sufficiently satisfied with her experience of civilization to brave the wilderness with the same spirit, and the rags she had patched up in her few spare moments, were bundled up in a few more.

"Why, where be ye going?" enquired deaf old Nanny, with the voice of a grasshopper.

“Away, Nanny.”

“Away ! Where to ?”

“To the kites and crows.”

“To fight the crows ?”

“Aye, Nanny.”

“And when be ye coming back ?”

“When yesterday comes back. I’m going away for good ; and I advise you to go home to the work-house for better.”

“Lawk ! What shall I tell master ?”

Nelly thought of the Sunday morning, when Aaron had taken such short leave. She had thought of it often, for he had said with a peculiar and strongly expressive look that he was going to Dover, from whence Mr. Cheek might chance to hear of him.

“Tell him,” she said, “he need not trouble himself to look for me to pay what he owes for the last two years. I leave it all to you, and if you don’t get it, I must send somebody *from Dover*.”

This was about as much as could be trusted to Nanny’s memory, and perhaps more ; but there was something of greater moment for Cheek’s information, and this was Nelly’s discovery of Mr. Fozzard’s understanding with Captain Cox, which she had so often been prevented from telling him, and which his recent turmoils had driven out of his head. It was most essential that he should know it, and she could not write ; neither could she communicate the omission to Polly Lightfoot, at that hour, without alarming the curiosity of Miss Pen. Nanny’s memory therefore was the only resource ;

and that it might not break down, the burthen was duly proportioned to its powers.

“Nanny, will you promise to remember two or three words without fail?”

“Yes, sure.”

“Well, then, as soon as Mr. Cheek comes home, tell him this—Nelly begged me to say she had found out that Captain Cox’s secret friend is Mr. Fozzard. Will you be sure to do it?”

“Ey, ey.”

“You won’t forget?”

“Na—sartin!”

“Now mind—Captain Cox’s secret friend is Mr. Fozzard. And so God bless you, Nanny. Come along, Tommy.”

And while the poor old creature was gaping with another question, they were off upon their travels.

Their first stage was not a long one, for they halted near the spot where Cheek had watched for Lucy; and here they sat down to consider what line they should take. They knew the forest as well as the animals bred in it: where to find the chestnut trees and the pure spring: where the old haunts in which they had minded father’s contraband stores, and the gipsy lived more merry than his friend the justice.

“We shall never want a living, Tommy, whilst I can make baskets and you can make traps. It is only those who depend on others that can’t get on. We see how God feeds the dumb things about us, but we never see them feed one another when they are old enough to pick up what He gives them;

and if they won't pick it up, it is their own fault if they die."

"That's just it, sister Nell," replied her sharp disciple. "We don't ought to trust to anybody but ourselves, for whenever our chaps offered to take my nestes for me, before I could climb for myself, they alleys sucked the eggs before they brought 'em down. But I know better now. Only wait till I grab a handful of hair from that old horse's tail, and a few sticks from that withy tree, and we'll have a jolly roast of blackbirds for dinner."

Nelly looked lovingly after him till he had scampered out of sight, and was turning more gravely round to muse on the feasibility of her own lesson, when she was startled by the apparition of Aaron Daunt.

We have just reminded the reader that Aaron left Cheek's abode on a Sunday morning, but it was long after that punctual attendant upon divine service had gone to church. The interval had passed in quiet conversation with Nelly, who soon found the idea she had formed from overhearing the few words with the Vicar, and a few more with Lucy, very much confirmed. Her feeling was that Aaron was not always the savage he appeared to be, but a man of quick and strong impulses, occasionally worked up to ferocity by characters and circumstances, which might have caused the same effect on very many people. He had told her his history and heard her own,—both as miserable as they well could be—and they had parted with mutual compassion and good-will. They were,

therefore, neither of them displeased at this accidental meeting.

“Nelly,” said Aaron, kindly, “it was just you that I was thinking about, and wishing very much to see.”

“Indeed, Mr. Aaron, I am glad you have found me, for in another minute you would have been too late. I hope you have been fortunate in that business which you said you mustn’t talk of.”

“Yes, Nelly, very much so, but not entirely. Is Mr. Bloomer still living?”

“Yes, and much better.”

“And is Miss Longland well?”

“I hear so.”

“I have come back to see her about a commission she gave me.”

“I’m afraid you will find it difficult, for it must needs be a private one, or it would not have been given so secretly. She is not likely to come out for fear of meeting Mr. Cheek, and you cannot see her at home without interruption from Mrs. Bloomer.”

“Perhaps you can give a message.”

“That is more difficult still. Mrs. Bloomer and I have had a terrible quarrel. You must wait two or three days, and then there will be no trouble, for Mr. Bloomer and Miss Lucy are going on a visit to Oakendell—about an hour’s walk from here.”

“I’m glad to hear it. I’m not pressed for a day or two.”

“You will go, I suppose, to Mr. Cheek?”

“No; I have nothing more to say to him *at*

present, and I should be glad if *you* had not, though I cannot tell you why."

"There is no need to give me a reason, for I have plenty, and have left him already."

"You couldn't have done better, my poor girl; but where are you going?"

"Nowhere in particular. To live amongst the wild things in the forest."

"By yourself?"

"With my little brother that I told you of, till I can find father."

"Can I help you? I have nothing to do till I can see Miss Longland, and I don't want to be seen myself. Your father, you say, is the captain of a crew of smugglers, and spends his life upon the sea, between the nearest coast to this place and the French one. Has he no home on shore?"

"None that I know of, except the county jail, where I hear he often passes two or three months."

"Jail?" repeated Aaron, with bitter recollections.

"Yes. Mr. Aaron. I ask your pardon for naming such a place; but, in father's case, I am forced to believe it is no such bad one, for whilst he is there he is prevented from drinking, and doing much that might, by-and-bye, send him to a worse one."

"Don't take on, poor Nelly. He must have a home somewhere. Whereabouts on the coast is he most likely to be met with?"

"It used to be at a small fishing town, more than fifty miles from here, called Sea Cliff; but I don't know now."

"And you never hear from him?"

"I've never heard since I have been here, or I should long ago have found my way to him."

"Fifty miles is but a short walk, Nelly, and, if it will be a comfort to you, I'll go and look for him."

"Will you, Mr. Aaron? May God forgive me for ever thinking wrong of you!"

"I find no fault with you, for who can think well of anybody who comes to see Cheek? You could not tell what brought me, but depend upon it I came with no friendly motive, nor do I feel much in his debt for my entertainment, which he dared not refuse me. Only tell me what I shall say to your father, and where I shall find you when I come back, and I will set off this minute."

Nelly's thanks were spoken in a passion of tears, for, except from Lucy and Mary Lightfoot, these were the first humane words, and this was the first service that had ever called for her gratitude, and they were the more touching for coming from a fellow sufferer, who was more than herself in want of them.

"I will show you, Mr. Aaron," she at length said, "the place we have chosen for our shelter, for it is directly in your way, and not more than a mile or two from where we stand. I was only waiting for Tommy, and here he comes."

The homeless party then left the public road, and made their way through the forest with the instinct of fur and feather, whilst Nelly made the way interesting by relating the new claims of Messrs.

Cox and Cheek to special attention. They were soon at their wild hiding-place, which will be more in need of description by-and-bye; and here Aaron left them to find existence where their so called betters would have starved.

We return to the less poetical seclusion of Green Lane's End, where Mr. Cheek arrived long after dark, tired, angry, hungry, and by no means disposed to patience under farther provocation. His return was signified by three thwacks at the door with his heavy blackthorn, which might have smashed the three heads of Messrs. Badger, Cox, and Crowley. Not being answered in the same number of seconds, they were followed up by half a dozen more, and these again by exertions more continuous, with uproarious vocal additions, and a chorus of village dogs. It was some time before the garrison surrendered, in the person of Mrs. Nanny Tuck, who, besides being deaf, had gone to sleep with her head, as usual, up the chimney. When she unlocked and unbarred the portal, she had no light, and Mr. Cheek relieved his heart of a storm of curses on the inattentive Nelly.

"It ain't no use," said the shrill old creature, "to curse Nelly, because she's gone away."

"Gone? Where's she gone to?"

"Eh? How should I know? She's took Tom Dabchick, and ain't coming back no more."

The news was startling; for Cheek had always been uneasy about Nelly's sharp powers of observation.

"Gone! She has nobody to go to!"

“Ees she has. I went after to bring her back, and seed her go away with the gentleman as came to supper one Saturday night, and went away next morning.”

“Aaron Daunt?”

“Ey—that’s what yer honour called him.”

If his honour was stunned before, this did not seem the best means of bringing him round; and the next shock was worse, for Nanny’s recollection improved as she wakened.

“Eh? Stop a bit! Ey, ey. Now I remember. She said she was going to some place called Dover. That was the name. She told me particular not to forget.”

Cheek looked as if she had shot him with her forefinger; and, as Nelly had feared, frightened all the rest of the message out of her head. After standing in that position some moments, he asked, with bated energy, why she did not bring a candle?

“Candle? Ey, ey,—as soon as I can find the tinder-box.”

“Have you got no fire?”

“Fire? Lauk, it went out whilst I was asleep.”

“Have you no hot water?”

“Lauk, I’m afraid not?”

“Nor dinner?”

“Dinner, yer honour? I thought ye’d dine out!”

Poor Mr. Cheek—what a day of trials! Pillaged of five thousand pounds, defied by the friend he had reckoned upon cheating, haunted by evil apprehensions, no grog to keep up his spirits, no fire to dispel his clammy chill, no dinner to restore his inward

man, and no consolation but a squeaky old crone of the workhouse ! If he was a little discontented and hasty under these accumulated griefs, it was a duty, as Mrs. Toogood might have said, to make great allowance !

But, in course of time, the tinder-box was found, the fire lighted, and the demons of darkness were driven about their business. Mr. Cheek's inward man derived much advantage from the comforts to which a good fire is generally preparative ; and, before very long, he found himself in a state of mind to review the incidents of the day.

He was gifted with great powers of resource, and had wonderful determination and energy. He had, moreover, courage to encounter any risk, so long as it involved no personal consequences ; which remark we are only led to make by the dignity with which he turned his back upon them in the Battle of the Wash-Tubs. In short, he had qualities far beyond the petty-larceny ones we have hitherto witnessed, and would have made an excellent lawyer or politician, supposing him possessed of the requisite foresight and depth of calculation, of which our opportunities of judging have not been enough to convince us.

But there was one trait in his character which predominated over all others ; and this was the vindictive one. Whenever it was at all disturbed it interrupted every other thought ; and the betrayal of his recent goings on, to Captain Cox, disturbed it beyond endurance. Who was his enemy ? Who was to be immolated ? Why had he forgotten to

question Nelly ? Why had she not reminded him ? It was some one near, for he must have written about the scene with Lucy and Mrs. Toogood the moment it occurred. Somebody in his power, and somebody who should feel it. But who ? If Nelly had found out she would, likely enough, have talked about it to old Nanny ; but Nanny was deaf and crazy ; yet no chance was to be lost. He shouted till the house shook, and Nanny seemed to feel the vibration, for she made her appearance, and asked if his honour called.

“ Come here—bring your ears closer—I think you have forgotten something.”

“ Ey ; so do I.”

“ Brush up, then, and tell me what it is.”

“ Eye ; but telle I’ve forgot.”

“ Was it anything that Nelly said ?”

“ Ey, sure ; so it was.”

“ Who was it about ?”

“ Who ? There it is ! if yer Honour could only think of his name——”

“ Was it Cox ?”

“ Cox ? That’s it ! Now I remember ! Cox and Fozzard.”

“ Fozzard ?”

“ E’es sure, that’s he ! and summit about secrets and friends.”

“ That Fozzard was Cox’s secret friend ?”

“ That’s it ! I wasn’t to forget, on no account !”

“ Do you remember any more ?”

“ Na.”

“ Then get along with you.”

"Ey, wish your Honour good night." And she left his Honour to enjoy his success. He could hardly believe in it. Woe to Mr. Fozzard ! But it was important to be quite sure. It was not impossible that his own words might have set Nanny dreaming ; and half dreaming himself, after his overpowering fatigue of mind and body, he went off to bed in a sort of waking nightmare.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HE appeared in the morning with no want of self-reliance, and with the hopeful look of one who, having a great deal to do, has arrived at the sometimes difficult decision of where to begin. It may be thought that this beginning was rather a small one, but we cannot grow an oak without planting an acorn ; and so his first scheme was a visit to Miss Pen, though she might have seemed the last person to assist him. The affairs of the donkey, with certain matrimonial rumours, were, of course, no secret to him ; but he had been too busy to present his congratulations, and now they might fetch their value. He did not expect to profit by her sagacity ; for, had she been gifted in that respect, it would only have stood in his way ; but her happy want of it afforded him all the advantages of a thief in the dark.

Before we introduce him at the cottage, we must show how cleverly Polly had prepared her way, and opened a broad field of action, to which he was conducted by an unforeseen turn in the interview.

Polly, on the morning after the donkey event, and the walk with Crowley, followed by the last dis-

coveries of Nelly, had boldly acquainted Miss Pen that Neddy Fozzard was no better than she should be, and a great deal worse ; and implored her to give him his mittimus. This she had accompanied with a declaration that she would never again act as their chaperon, never countenance the horror by appearing when he showed his detestable face, and never recognize him with a look that was not lightning.

Here was a mutiny in the heretofore patient and complying Polly ! Never since the fall of Jerusalem had Hebrew lady tossed her raven ringlets with such amazement as was manifest in the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn !

“Never countenance Mr. Fozzard ! Have you lost your senses ? Never countenance *him* !”

“No, Pen, never ! You shall never say I have helped in your hideous delusion. I am not at liberty to say all that I know or how I know it ; but of this I warn you—Neddy Fozzard is a vile impostor, a double-dealing cheat, and a shame to the dirt he treads on !”

“Mary, is it come to this ? Has jealousy of Mr. Fozzard’s attention to *me* so distorted your understanding, so perverted your principles, that you seek to gratify your malice by accusations of which you confess you have no proof ?”

“I *have* proof, and proof enough to smother him, if I chose to give it ; but you have had proofs enough yourself if you chose to see them. For what purpose do you suppose the low-bred vulgarian has delayed his condescending proposals, all the time he has forced himself upon us ? For what pur-

pose has he made such constant and such feeling enquiries into all that concerns you ? For what purpose but to assure himself that you have money enough to make a good speculation !”

Pen screamed outright !

“ What ! Tell me that Mr. Fozzard has no view but money ! He that has estates all over the kingdom ! I that am the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn, and can reckon back to the first chapter of the Book of Kings ! Taunt me with the base insinuation that I have no claims to attention but a few contemptible thousands !”

“ Hush, Pen, for heaven’s sake ! Let him believe the money is all mine, and then we shall be better judges of his projects.”

“ And is it so that you hope to obtain him for yourself ? Most delightful ! Most transparent !”

“ Tell him as much, I beseech you ; and that, the moment I am blest with such a treasure, I shall most willingly suffer death for poisoning him ! But do ask yourself why he did not come in with you last night to take his dozen cups of tea, and why he has made no civil enquiry this morning. Why, but because he is afraid of committing himself too far before he is better informed ?”

Polly here touched upon a soreish place ; which, however, as in another branch of the creation, only caused Pen to caracole with more vigour.

“ Why did he not come in to tea, and why has he made no enquiries ? Why, but because of the reception you always give him ? Who could be blind to such rudeness, and what person of Mr. Fozzard’s sensitive nature could put up with it ? Most cruel and most

unnatural? First, to expose me as you did last night, to the talk of all the country, and then to stand in the way of the only reparation!"

Here the lorn sacrifice dissolved into pathos.

"What if your conduct has finally discouraged him? What then is to become of your hapless sister? Men of Mr. Fozzard's position are not like Mr. Philpot! They have other things to think of than their feelings, and are only awakened to them by such accidents as occurred last night, and may never, never occur again!"

"For goodness sake, my dear Pen, don't be so despairing. Give Neddy the second an additional feed of corn, as I told you, and put Neddy the first on his back, and I'll answer for it you may afford all the delicate attentions you received in less than half a minute."

But Polly's indignation was soon over, and when Pen's upbraidings had worn out two more days, and herself too, and Mr. Fozzard was still an absentee, she began to pity the exhausted sufferer, and tried to comfort her.

"I think," she said, "this matter cannot be too soon brought to a close, and see that if it is left to Mr. Fozzard it will bubble on for ever, and never be boiled out. Why not engage some friend to ask him what he means? Here is old Kit Cheek—if Mrs. Toogood and Lucy and Mr. Crowley have not demolished him—will be charmed to ask him who he is, and where he comes from, and what he has got, and what he wants, and all that; and if he does not satisfy *Kit*, let *Kit* satisfy *him*, that we mean to

be ‘better strangers,’ and then, you know, we can live together just according to your own notions of what is proper.”

Though Pen was in fits at this counsel, it was exactly what she wished, and therefore she thought it a good occasion to display an example of sisterly affection by telling Polly to dispose of her just as she pleased.

It was the fifth disconsolate morning after the loves of the donkeys, and when Cheek’s misdemeanours and misadventures had made the circuit of the parish, that he was seen to approach the cottage gate, and as Pen believed nothing to his disadvantage, and Polly nothing to his credit, the one ran away, whilst the other got herself up to receive him.

“Ah, Miss Pennylopy!” he exclaimed, “I have come to make my complaints. Going to be married, and let an old friend like me wait all this while for the announcement! Why, Miss Lopy, Miss Lopy!”

The delicate Miss Lopy held out her trembling hand, but could not speak or look at him.

“Why, Miss Lopy, how is this? I expected to find you in high spirits, and blushing like the rose, but here you are drooping like a broken lily! Come, come, this is too bad! I know you are happy enough in your heart, and you must make me so too, by telling me all about it, for who can feel such an interest as your oldest friend?”

“Nobody, Mr. Cheek,” she faltered, “and I should have sent to you, but—”

“But what, Miss Lopy?”

“ I—I had—no—nothing to tell you.”

“ Nothing to tell me, and going to be married !”

Miss Pen put her handkerchief to her eyes, and signified in the same agitated manner that she—believed—there was—some mistake.

“ Mistake !”

“ Ye—yes.”

“ What, don’t you know whether you are going to be married or not ?”

“ N—no !”

“ That’s very odd. Has Mr. Fozzard never asked you ?”

“ I’m—not sure.”

With much distressing effort she got a little farther, and gradually explained how matters stood, and that sister Mary had thought some friend should dispel Mr. Fozzard’s diffident reserve, and make some kind enquiries, suggesting that Mr. Cheek might perhaps be so very good.

“ Enquiries ! To be sure I will !”

“ Oh, Mr. Cheek !”

“ Only let me know a little more of him first. Only tell me, Miss Lopy, what *you* know about him.”

Miss Lopy signified, rather than said, “ Not very much.”

“ Well, but *how* much ?”

Pen’s virgin lips shaped themselves into the expression of “ Nothing !”

“ Um ! That certainly ain’t much.”

“ He is a—gentleman of—great abilities.”

“ That’s a matter for *your* consideration ; but, for

my own part, I should rather hear he was a gentleman of great fortune."

"I—believe—he is."

"And what reason have you to believe so, Miss Lopy?"

"I—don't know."

"What is he doing in Broome Warren?"

"He—walks about."

"Nothing else? Come, you mustn't be so shy with an old friend. He must walk about on some business or other."

Pen gained a little more courage. She believed he had immense landed property, and was very fond of visiting the farmers to learn their new modes of cultivation.

"The farmers!" repeated Mr. Cheek, with a mental memorandum. "And what has he learnt from them?"

She did not know; but, she believed, a great deal, because he was constantly writing letters, which she supposed were to other people of great property.

"I should like my friend, Cox, to profit by such good advice. Two such eminent men ought to be acquainted."

Pen looked surprised, and recovered her presence of mind a little more.

"Cox, did you say? That is singular! Mr. Fozzard wrote a letter here, not long ago, and I accidentally saw the address was to a Captain Cox."

"Was it indeed! I am delighted to hear it—delighted!"

"Yes, Mr. Cheek, because as Captain Cox is a friend of yours you can obtain all the information I am unable to give you."

"Never fear, Miss Lopy; we've got him now."

"Have we indeed! But you cannot be sure!"

"But I *am* sure, and you may take your oath of it!"

What a transport to see her oldest friend so positive. It made her almost herself.

"Good-bye, Miss Lopy; I must catch him before he goes out walking again."

But Pen could not part with her kind friend yet. She was so agitated, so ignorant of such matters. She had never thought of them in her life. Of course not. Dear Mr. Cheek must instruct her in everything. She could only suppose. She supposed his first step would be to inquire Edward's intentions. If he should say he had none, she could not suppose he would talk of ulterior proceedings or hint at breaches of promise, it would be so shocking, and, as she had said, she was not sure. She was so inexperienced, so very, she did not know what she was saying. She supposed, if he proved sincere, the next thing would be the odious discussion of settlements; of which, thank Heaven, she had not the remotest notion. She only supposed it, and then the repulsive conditions of securing her own fortune to her sole and separate use, just as if she could mistrust such a man as Mr. Fozzard. Monstrous!

"Well done, Miss Lopy! For a young lady who has never thought of such things your suppositions

are surprising. But I must not delay, or he'll be off at his walks."

And Mr. Cheek rose and Miss Pen rose, with one hand trembling on the back of her chair and the other still detaining him.

" You are so good, Mr. Cheek ; so considerate to think of all this. I suppose there can be nothing else ?"

" No, Miss Lopy. I think that's about enough, and so keep up your spirits, and depend upon it I will give a good account of him."

" Good-bye, Mr. Cheek. I suppose it will not be necessary to remind him of pin money, or those revolting provisions for discrepancies of taste. I could never survive them. People are so horribly worldly ; a world of which I am thankful to say I don't know the meaning."

" No, Miss Lopy, no. I see you don't, you are all simplicity, all——" something which she could not catch as he made his way out of the door, but it sounded like " sucking dove." If she had heard the rest, after the door closed, she might have thought it bore an equal resemblance to Screws and Harpies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE retirement in which Mr. Fozzard philosophized was, as we have stated, over the shop of Mr. Choke, the apothecary, druggist, and chemist, with a slight dash of the grocer, selected perhaps for its aromatic savours of tea and tobacco, poor man's plasters, castor oil, and peppermint water; all very suggestive of the climes over which the poet's eye is said to roll in such a fine frenzy. It was not very large, but a person of ordinary longitude might have taken three or four steps, corner wise, without walking through the wall. In the middle of this nut shell was the kernel, or perhaps, as it was a living thing, we ought to say the grub, with an inky stump in his fingers and a blotted proof sheet before him, hunting for a new idea, and about to have a blank day—a metaphor of the conglomerate order, warranted genuine from the land of poesy which produced the crocodile with his hand in his breeches pocket.

"I hope I don't rob the world of a good thought," said Pen's ambassador, introduced by the 'prentice boy.

"Don't mention it, Mr. Cheek," responded Mr. Fozzard, with urbane pomposity. "Don't mention it, sir; all my thoughts are public property. I live for the public."

"And, no doubt, the public live for you."

"Ha! well! give and take, Mr. Cheek, give and take. Pray be seated, sir. I consider it to be every man's duty to benefit the age in which he lives."

"Very true, Mr. Fozzard! We must pull up our shirt sleeves and pump away; and, by all accounts, your sucker will never be dry."

"Ha! ha! Not a bad figure of speech! I beg pardon, I have a sudden thought," and he took a dip of his stump and made a note.

"Well, sir," he resumed, "it must be a toilsome duty, I admit, for those whose efforts are not appreciated, very; and there are a great many stragglers, as you country gentlemen would say, who follow fame upon a cold scent, and tail off—ha! ha! tail off in the distance."

"Very true, sir; very true. It ain't everybody that goes the pace you do. And that reminds me that I shall tail off with the rest, if I don't cut in. I have called upon a delicate matter relating to Miss Lopy Pinhorn."

"Hah! a charming young lady, full of talent and accomplishment."

"Up to the brim; or else she could not have been so sensible of yours. Well, it is about this engagement that has been so long talked of."

Mr. Fozzard was at a loss to know what engage-

ment was alluded to. Upon his word he was ashamed to say he had forgotten. Was it to dinner or to tea? But Cheek soon apprised him that evasions would not answer; though when he was made to comprehend the nature of the engagement, upon his word he now heard of it for the first time. There might—hah, yes, there might be such a one looming in the future; but such engagements depended a little upon circumstances. And then he descended a trifle to the world beneath the clouds, to hear what circumstances were coming.

“I am aware, Mr. Fozzard, that they do depend on circumstances, and the first circumstance is—you’ll excuse me for our want of information in these remote parts—she tells me she doesn’t know who you are.”

“Ho, ha! Not know who I am! Well, it certainly is far in the country. But, hah, it is not for me to speak of myself. I leave the world to do that for me; and you must pardon me if I refer you to that—a—rather extended field of information.”

“ You are fortunate in having so many godfathers and godmothers to answer for you; but the most important question—you’ll excuse me, for I speak under instructions, and believe business is always best done in fewest words—the most important question is not who you are, but what you have got ?”

Mr. Fozzard again guffawed—“ What I have got ! Ho—ho—ho; upon my word I—aw—have not the smallest idea. But, of course, with my position, it

is—a—just what I please. Such matters have very little of my consideration; but if it is customary, in the everyday course of common life, I suppose I must so far conform to that custom as to enquire—though I hardly know how to descend to such trifles—something about these things on the other side."

"Quite according to rule, sir. Miss Lopez has a very pretty fortune of fifteen thousand pounds."

Mr. Fozzard made an approving bow.

"Which she desires to have settled for her sole and separate use, during life, and subject to her last will and testament."

Mr. Fozzard threw his head back again.

"Ah, yes, of course; and it would have been a pride to me to settle it so; if—a—there had really been any engagement." Which was said with the blank stare of some unfortunate, who, in proceeding full dress to a charming party, suddenly plumps his foot in the gutter.

"No engagement! Then how about the donkey ride?"

"Oh, the donkey ride. Ah, a very narrow escape, and very fortunate that I happened to be there. Miss Pennylopy was much excited, and you are aware, Mr.—a—Cheek, that under such circumstances, a man who—I say it without the slightest feeling of self-glorification, for we can claim no merit from natural advantages—a man who has the power of poetical language, may express himself more strongly than the less gifted. Probably I may

have done so ; but I have a perfect recollection that nothing was said of engagements."

This was very dignified, but very like the bravura of that fine bird the Booby, on the tree-top, under fascination of the snake at the foot of it; for, lofty as he was, Mr. Fozzard was sensible from a sparkle through Cheek's squeezed-up eyelids, that down he must go.

"Come," replied the ambassador, with a comical change of tone and crinkles, "this great advantage of poetical language may do for people who have not cut their eye teeth, but it won't do for you and me. Miss Lopy and no settlements would not have been a bad spec; but Miss Lopy with sole and separate use, is no go. Mind what you are about, Fozzy, and secure a friend whilst you can. Pennylopy takes you for a man of fortune, and I take you for a man who means to make one. But you can't start without capital; and fifteen thousand, settled sole and separate, is nothing at all. Your business is to get hold of it absolutely."

Mr. Fozzard was not so obtuse as we began by thinking him, though sufficiently so when he attempted the man of consequence; but in the lower walk of worldly affairs he was not to be despised; so, seeing Cheek was not to be outwitted, he did not contradict him.

"That being the case," resumed the conscientious envoy, "I will engage to further your views on condition that you lend a light to mine. Are you prepared to do that?"

"That's what I call business, Mr. Cheek."

“Very well, then. On that condition you shall only have to tumble down upon your marrow-bones again, and perform the highly difficult task of making a fool of yourself; for which you shall be paid fifteen thousand pounds in hard cash. I have now to tell you *your* part in this compact, for without a steady performance of that, you must of course be prepared to find all I am going to do for you is to do you up. That’s business, you know—a word from me and good-bye to Jerusalem. You have been taking notes amongst the tenants, and collecting village scandal, and doing me a great deal of mischief by sending it all off to Captain Cox.”

Mr. Fozzard began to stammer.

“Oh, never mind. All in the way of business. I have mine, as well as you, which is fair on both sides. He has bought up the debts against the Broome Warren estate upon your showing of its value, and what I want to know distinctly, is the object of this?”

Mr. Fozzard was quick to find how rapid is the course of roguery. His imposition upon Miss Pen was only to be managed by treachery to Captain Cox, and his large white face looked very much like a lighted turnip.

“As I hope to be saved, Mr. Cheek, he never mentioned any object but a good investment.”

“Very likely; but what do you suppose?”

“My dear frien, what *can* I suppose?”

“Why, you can suppose that, if we don’t deal above board, I shall go back to Pennylopy.”

Mr. Fozzard was naturally of a timid disposition, and Mr. Cheek was a bully, which gave him an immense advantage. The expression with which he insinuated his menace was a great help to the slow imagination.

“Upon my word, I can’t—a—say it has ever gone so far as a supposition, but an idea, I believe, has—a—sometimes crossed my mind that Captain Cox *may* have thought of a purchase.”

“Speak out, Fozzy. I am not likely to tell him, because it does not suit me. He has told you so all along?”

“Well, I don’t like to betray confidence; but, as it is only between ourselves, I don’t see that it can do much harm.”

“Out with it.”

“Well, between ourselves, he has.”

“I thought so. And then, when the purchase is made, I am to be turned out of the agency?”

“Really, I—ha—there’s no saying. He may think that a better agent is not to be found.”

“Come, come; I know what sort of an agent you have described me. No offence amongst men of the world. If I had wanted to turn *you* out, I should not have said much good of you. You know well enough that I am to be turned out?”

“Well,” said the hard-pressed philosopher, seeing there was no evasion, and with his turnip face pretty well varnished with its tepid exhalations, “there certainly was some mention of it.”

“Man alive, don’t be delicate about it. It is only business. Don’t I tell you I must go and blow you

up with Miss Lopy, and cut you out of fifteen thousand pounds, unless you speak out ! I am to be turned out, you say ; and now who's to be put in my place ? Out with it ! You, of course, you."

Neddy was a man of slow motions, and always confused when he was hurried ; and so he answered with a yes and a no ; and then with a no and a yes.

" Which means yes. He is to turn me out and put you in my place ?"

" In strict confidence, yes."

" So ! we are getting on now. And why does he want to buy Broome Warren ?"

" That is impossible to say."

" Oh, no ; it is very possible. Quite as possible as the fact that when Mrs. Bloomer went to London he learnt her intention from you, and wrote in consequence to Miss Longland. Now can you make out why he wants the estate ? Is it not as a temptation to her to become Mrs. Cox ; and doesn't he want Mrs. Cox to secure his claim to something better ?"

Alas for Edward ; if Pen could only have seen him so *chiffonné*. There was no escape, and no resource but to reconcile his treason to his conscience by deciding that these questions could not go so near the truth without previous information. This made matters more easy, and he wiped his face and tried to make it cheerful.

" Ho, ho ! Well, you've got it at last. I wouldn't betray secrets, but as you have them without my assistance—yes."

" That's the way, Fozzy. Be frank and be friends.

He's determined to have her, is he ? Well, we shall see. Now there's one thing more. You must let me know everything he does, and as soon as he does it, and as soon as he thinks of doing it; and the first thing must be an application to Chancery for the immediate sale. I look to you to settle this, and I give you one month. If the order is not out, and the day fixed by that time, depend upon it your personal estate will not fetch fifteen thousand pounds."

It was not easy to understand the motive for this condition; for the sale of the property appeared to be the last thing that Cheek could desire.

"You don't understand it, don't you ? There's no need why you should. It suits my plans that the application to Chancery should be made by Cox. Nobody can make it but a creditor, and he is the only one."

"Then make yourself easy on that point, for it suits both parties, and has been his intention for some time."

"Take care he puts it in execution in no time, and take care he doesn't know he is playing my game —take care of that, for I mean to have no wedding before the sale ; and, if anything goes wrong, you may make up your mind that I mean to have none after it. All in the way of business, and not the less friends ; but ruin you I must, and ruin you by —— I will !"

It was rather strong language between friends ; but being spoken with Mr. Cheek's peculiar ex-

pression of humour, it did duty for an excellent joke, which they both seemed to enjoy very much, and were beginning to be first-rate company, when Miss Pen's butler, Mr. Sprat, was heard to rush into the shop with a breathless enquiry of when Mr. Cheek was going back.

“Tell him he must come directly, for missis is took bad!”

“Laws!” cried the prentice-boy; “what ails her?”

“Mad staggers, or some such thing! Just for all the world as if she'd been a-eating of green gooseberries!”

“Don't say so! Here's a bottle of salvolatily—teaspoonful in a glass o' water! Fermentation—smart hand-rubbing—part affected!”

“*I* know, *I* know. Had it myself a—many times.”

“Few peppermint drops—warm her hinside—nothin' like 'em.”

“I know,” replied the messenger, cramming half-a-dozen into his own mouth, and clattering up-stairs with his terrible tidings.

“Missis is a-dying!” he cried, “and says she can't last, nohow at all, till your worship goes back.”

“Go along, you noisy little varlet, and tell her I'm busy!”

“Oh yes, I dessay! and get your worship's blowing up! I get enough on my own account for all that! What's the use of my saying you're busy, when she's a-kicking in fits.”

“Confound the rabid old Jewess!” exclaimed the

envoy, I must go and hold her down. Run, and say I'm coming!"

"Yessir. Make haste, or you'll be too late!" And away he scampered.

Like the bubble blown-up by the straw, Mr. Cheek swelled into the bigger bully, even for the puffing of Mr. Sprat, for it was another puff to his consequence.

"You see, Fozzard," he said, in a dignified peroration to the sitting, "I have not boasted of more than I can perform, and you may understand from that my determination to act strictly as a man of honour, either to make your fortune or send you to the devil—according to your behaviour. Come to me to-night, with all the notes you have made for Cox, and all the letters you have received from him; and don't forget a word you have heard from the farmers, that I may consider what sort of example to make of them. You shall then hear something more of Pennylopy. But remember, in the meantime, that you are not to leave Broome Warren for a single day without my permission, and that I shall expect you to report yourself every evening at toddy-time."

Poor Neddy protested roundly that he would stick as closely as Cheek himself to the point of honour, and very much resembled a great bulbous schoolboy who has become fag to a sharp fifth-former, and puts a cheerful face upon it, for fear of a pommelling. Cheek then pulled up his trousers, and picked his way down the cranky, three-cornered stairs, and prowled towards the cottage—moralising as he

went upon the great treachery of Fozzard, and maturing the iniquities of the only man he could trust. But as the numerous irons in his forge were not, at this time, sufficiently heated to be hammered into shape for their place in this history, we must leave him to blow his bellows, whilst we return to better company.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

CHAPTER I.

THE day after the commencement of these friendly relations, Mrs. Toogood drove through the village with the Vicar and Lucy and Polly, none of them inconsolable for their farewells. Mrs. Toogood was happy because she had inexperience to advise and old age to doctor. Lucy and Polly were happy because they had not met for a month, and had conversation to exhaust a twelvemonth ; and the Vicar was happy because he had relieved Mrs. Bloomer of her conjugal cares till he might be more able to appreciate them. But as all that was talked of, and much that was not may be understood, we have only to chronicle a general aspiration that the progress of so genial a sun over the first hues of autumn were directed by as leisurely a driver as the grandee upon the coach-box.

When, at length, the short journey was accomplished, and what had recently been called the ruined

house of Oakendell, formed the fitting centre to the many-coloured wilderness, the transformations were allowed to be magical. If Mrs. Toogood had not already been driven to the painful acknowledgment that her patronage had, for once, been mistaken, the scene before her must have finally settled the claims of Mr. Cheek ; and if pretty Polly had not pronounced him rogue with all its synonyms, here was ample inspiration for them. Probably some such thoughts were suggested to Lucy also, but she did not speak them, and it is just as probable that they were overpowered by certain other thoughts which she loved better ; such as who, and for whose sake, had done so much for the place so dear to her. The Vicar, whose memories of former days had much outlived his recent ones, was less sensible of alterations, and made no remark excepting that he wondered whether they should find Sir Harry and his sister at home. As for Lucy ! the tears sprang from her eyes ; but, in the same moment, the carriage stopped at the door, and there was Crowley to convert them into smiles.

Mrs. Toogood was the first to alight ; and, according to the established custom of a great many of our excellent friends, to stop the way for those behind her, whilst she gratified her nephew with a great deal of approbation, and a little good advice.

“ You know, James, you are apt to be very careless, but I hope you now see the necessity of never employing any agent without assuring yourself that he is perfectly trustworthy ; and, above all,

I counsel you—and I hope you will impress it strongly on your memory—that you should have his character from reliable sources, and not take it entirely from himself. I speak from experience, and am quite sure that no sensible person will contradict what I say."

And so the sagacious lady stepped into the hall, and took a slide on the polished oak floor.

The next to trip down was pretty Polly, who had been kept poised on the carriage step during the lecture, awaiting her turn for instruction on the necessity of always bearing in mind that oak floors are very slippery and require great caution ; a maxim with all considerate people, which ought not to be forgotten. As Polly committed this valuable lesson to memory, Lucy presented a hand which said all that Crowley could have wished for ; and he then helped down the Vicar, like a fragile package placarded "Glass," and, "This side uppermost."

Standing on the house steps, the old man looked round with a dreamy sort of recollection, and as if he thought the once familiar objects not quite the same as they used to be.

"Long time," he murmured, "longer than I 'magine, since I was here last. How long is it, Sir Harry?"

"Mr. Crowley, uncle," interposed poor Lucy ; her bright eyes again glistening with something else as bright.

"Mr. Crowley, yes, to be sure, Crowley, of course ! I am growing a little forgetful, Mr.-a-a-very, I'm

afraid. It's a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you."

"Yesterday, uncle—only yesterday—don't you remember how kind Mr. Crowley was in calling, and sitting with you for more than an hour?"

"Yesterday—long while ago—not been here since you—no—since Sir Harry left the country. Couldn't bear—see it after! Seems improved—trees grown higher—walls—more ivy."

"Let me assist you in, my dear sir. The roads are too rough for an invalid, and you will be the better for a little rest."

"What does—gentleman say?" he enquired; for amongst other dilapidations, his faculty of hearing had not escaped.

"Mr. Crowley asked you to take his arm on that side, and you must take mine on this."

He did as he was bidden, and was soon placed in an easy chair in the drawing-room; looking round him quite as calmly and unconsciously as if he had not been the electric medium in a deep case of physics. Life seemed no more than the mere fluff of a weed which the quivering of the stem was shaking off, and the next breeze might waft away.

"Think I remember this room. My father, mother, lived here, when old Sir Harry, at great house, and Harry, young Harry and I—boys together—Lucy's mother, my sister, all dead now!"

And his voice continued indistinct and dying away, like the distant tolling of a bell. Lucy had many bitter thoughts to struggle against. How

happily her father and mother had carried on their young courtship, perhaps in this very room ! What years of suffering had followed ! How blest was one to be lying in the village churchyard ; and what was the fate of the other ? What was to be her own ? But she was used to struggle and knew how much depended on her fortitude, which Crowley aided her to maintain by turning the Vicar's docile recollections in another course. He was soon enjoying a childish sort of glee in scenes of livelier hue, snatching a flower here and a berry there, with merry jokes at companions of days less overcast, and with no want of the boastings of many a blithe old man who loves to indulge his hearers with bygone exploits, of which there remain no memories but his own. They were, of course, chiefly of a sporting character, for the remote nooks of the country afforded little else in those times for the pastime of the parson, who was always a hard rider, and the jolliest "man of men since born." Amongst his boldest rivals had been old Roger Philpot, the son of Cymon, "who was older," and, in his turn, had been the son of somebody else, "older still," all famous in their way, one for a timber leap, another for a double ditch, and every one for his brew. But the parson beat them all, and lived to laugh at them.

"So I have heard, and so I rejoice to see, Mr. Bloomer. And I hope to see you beat Thomas, the son of Roger, who says you christened him, and is coming here to dine with you."

" Wha-at ! I—Tom the babby !"

" Tom that was one ; but Tom the fine fellow now, and a great friend of mine. I hope we shall not fatigue you ?"

Lucy smiled her thanks for an invitation so mindful of her uncle's enjoyment ; but there was no change of expression that hinted more for herself, though a rosy tinge was visible on the cheek of pretty Polly. Crowley was quick of perception, and was now more so than usual. Had Tom's fascinations made a double shot, or had he missed what he aimed at, and killed by accident ?

" I have really," he continued, " derived much pleasure from the acquaintance of Mr. Philpot, and am much mistaken if he has not a very kind heart."

" You are not mistaken," replied Lucy. " There cannot be a kinder one."

The words would have made a duller spirit jealous, but to Crowley they sounded anything but alarming ; and, though Mrs. Toogood turned a slight glance upon her pet, he, as slightly, kept his upon Polly, who said nothing. It was a small circumstance, but he noted it down for further observation.

" Come, Mr. James," said his aunt, " it is getting late, and we want to see how young bachelors provide for their visitors upstairs, before we are surprised by dinner. We mean to be very critical, especially Miss Lightfoot, who wonders whether you will be an improvement upon Mr. Fozzard."

Polly laughed, and Crowley said he should live in hopes ; and the Vicar was helped to his room,

and again performed the office of electric medium, and the party separated to their toilets. Lucy and Polly found themselves in adjoining rooms, for which arrangement their host received great credit.

“Look,” cried Polly through the open door, “what splendid roses! He must have ravaged all the gardens for miles round, for I know old Kit’s pigs must have disposed of every flower in this. What have you got there?” And she came in to examine. “What! nothing! Ah! what have we here? This little vase? Nothing but forget-me-nots! What can be the meaning of this? Is there any particular signification in this difference between us? What do you understand by it? Ha! ha! I shall go and dress.”

When they had completed their labours, and she had twisted one of the beautiful moss roses in her hair, she insisted upon decorating her friend with a tasteful display of the little blue tell-tales. After which they descended and found the rest of the party assembled, with the addition of a superbly dressed gentleman, whom, at first, they did not recognize.

It may be remembered that Mr. Philpot made a journey to London, with an important artistic purpose, on which he was to consult a distinguished professor from Germany. He was afraid, he said to that gentleman, that his commission would be rather difficult to execute, but he had been assured that Herr Schneiders could accomplish impossibilities;

and the particular impossibility of which he was in quest was to be made to look exactly like the gentleman whose card he presented. Herr Schneiders was a man of amazing genius, and had not the slightest doubt he could make them as like as twin brothers; whereupon a wardrobe was ordered, in all respects suitable to that end. The result was that the young ladies now arched their eyebrows upon an elegant stranger in an admirably cut coat, and waistcoat, and trousers for Apollo, patent leather dancing boots, turned down collar, with slender white tie, and three brilliant studs in his ample exposure of laced shirt front. In all other respects he was a model for a Court ball. Nothing remained of the original Tom Philpot; not even the eyes or the nose. For, when relieved of the huge wad of old-fashioned neck cloth which had hitherto been choking him, his face, which had been short and round, tumbled down and became a decent oval—the length giving a fair proportion to the nose, which had been swollen out of reason, and allowing a natural opening of the eyelids which had, all his life before, been threatening to squeeze out their balls.

When Lucy and Polly were assured that it was Tom, and no other, they had much ado to refrain from unguarded exclamations, but the new man of fashion appeared to be so confused and ashamed of himself that they forced their surprise within bounds, and pretended to see nothing uncommon; though Polly, long afterwards, confessed that she

was very nearly laughing and crying at the same time.

In the short general conversation which preceded dinner he seemed to understand that he should be out of keeping unless he adopted a corresponding elegance and ease of deportment, which, we are concerned to say, did not heighten the masterly work of the tailor. Not knowing what to do with his hands, he crossed them behind his back, and being equally at a loss to know what to do with every feature of his face, he turned it with dignified absence to the ceiling ; but Polly was too sharp for him, and detected that, in the first action he was slyly feeling whether his skirts sufficiently covered him behind ; and, in the second, taking a downward glance to see whether his waistcoat and waistband stood the strain and betrayed no hiatus before. These manœuvres were not fortunate, and he made them worse by extravagant recourse to hems and haws and coughs and applications to his handkerchief—the ordinary resources of shy folks in difficulties, till Mrs. Toogood was quite sure he had a very bad cold, and ought to take nothing for dinner but mutton broth and barley water.

When dinner was announced, Crowley gave his arm to Mrs. Toogood ; Lucy aided her uncle, and Mr. Philpot led the rueful risibility of Miss Lightfoot.

“ Now, Miss Polly,” he whispered, as they crossed the hall, “ you have known me from cub to bear, and that I have never been to any dinner party

more refined than a harvest home, and so you really must take charge of me. I'm not so much afraid of the present party singly ; but, taken all together, they would frighten me out of my wits, if I had any ; so, if I do anything wrong or ill-bred, do give me a little hem or a nudge for old acquaintance sake."

"Very well, Mr. Tom ; but you know I have never been to a dinner party either, unless Neddy Fozzard was a party."

"Aye ! aye ! but you are so clever, and know everything by guess so much better than anybody else does by practice !"

"Very well, very well ; hush !"

And hushed he was, for though he had been ushered into the drawing-room before it was lighted and when the evening was far advanced, he had marked the consternation of both Polly and Lucy at his metamorphosis. His case was now much worse ; for the nest of young storks, so gracefully depending from the hall skylight, had been fed with flames, and the old bird was like a comet, and the chains of golden bronze were glittering like wreaths of stars, and there were flashes on the polished oak around and beneath, and he saw that he was "the fly in amber," and that everybody would "wonder how he got there."

But the hall was nothing to the dining-room, which seemed to his home-accustomed eyes the most brilliant of the caves of Ophir, for the same effects continued with the addition of gorgeous crimson, the

prismatic gleams of exquisitely cut glass, and an Aurora Borealis from the decorations of frosted and burnished silver. Everything combined to intensify the light on the table on which he was to be entomologized.

Nevertheless, he had presence of mind to take his place in support of Mrs. Toogood, with Polly on his other hand, and Lucy and the Vicar opposite, and the usual lively notes of a friendly party ran round the board, with no exception but the note of honest Tom, who, being a newly caught bird, sat panting on his perch, and sorely wishing his fine feathers could fly away with him ; but the carol continued, and none of his mates pecked at him, till (another metaphor from the land of song) he thought it necessary to report his presence, so he suffered his soup to go the wrong way, and coughed, and again flourished his handkerchief, which Polly perceived was not cambric, but a silken emblazonment of the colours of the renowned Jem Belcher.

“ Ahem !” she said, as a hint to hide it, and poor Tom, not knowing what fault he had committed, blushed to the point of his nose and the tips of his ears, as if he had been painted for a Christmas Pantomime. But still he escaped observation, for the rest were attending to the Vicar, who, brightened up by a glass of champagne, was proclaiming his satisfaction that the poultry had not been invited, as it was at the Vicarage where the game-cock sat on the back of Mrs. Bloomer’s chair, and took all the conversation to himself. Here was a lively laugh, and

Tom laughed too, and Lucy and Polly chatted unconstrainedly across the table, and Mrs. Toogood was all affability, and Crowley talked, as he always did, in the easy strain which often atones for the shortcomings of a dismal dozen.

But alas ! Tom began to make a rash estimate of the art of conversation from its apparent facility, and to feel a thrill of ambition to revolve in some little orbit of his own, which caused him to watch, with bated breath, for a fair opportunity. Ill-fortune soon brought it about, by the casual mention of some new book—the subject which Crowley had said on his first visit would most recommend him to the ladies—and he gave a preliminary “Hem!” for audience, and “went up for matriculation.”

“Ahem!” he repeated, and all eyes turned to enquire what was coming next. “Ahem, Mrs. Toogood, I’ve been reading a new book myself, which I have found deeply interesting.”

“Indeed,” replied Mrs. Toogood. “Pray tell me what it is, for the recommendation of a valuable book is the most desirable mode of conveying instruction. It enables us to improve our minds just when we feel them disposed for it, and to meditate advantageously on much that must escape in the rapid course of conversation. That’s my opinion.”

“And that’s just mine, ma’am; for I find that whatever people say goes in at one ear and out at the other; whereas a book is—ahem!—a book is—a—in my opinion, a—a book.”

“Hem!” said pretty Polly, with a glance of vexa-

tion, which seemed to add, “ You goose, why can’t you hold your tongue?”

But Lucy felt a good-natured desire to help him on, and saved him the trouble of putting head or tail to his opinion, by asking the name of the book.

“ It is called ‘The Horse,’ ” answered Tom, his access of fever becoming more alarming from Polly’s last intimation of a tickling in her throat, “ and is really the most interesting work I ever read.”

The tickling in Polly’s throat became a little cough, but Tom had got too far from shore to drop his anchor, and was boarded by the jolly old Vicar.

“ The horse,” he was obliged to explain, “ was not the horse described in the Book of Job, though he might be a job horse, nor was he the Pale Horse that galloped at such a rate with the King of Terrors, but a black, white, or grey, strawberry, or skewbald, or any other colour,” and then the rest of the party could not help another laugh, which again brought out the Belcher, and a prolonged note from the trombone. He was, however, in for it, and whilst pretty Polly could hardly restrain the fun in one eye, and almost a tear in the other, he proceeded to state that the book was, strictly speaking, a medical book.

This, of course, fixed the attention of Mrs. Too-good more profoundly, for who has ever seen the elderly lady who was not gifted with a genius for medicine? To that lady, therefore, Mr. Philpot

chiefly directed his information that, with the aid of “The Horse,” he could cure any disorder known.

“For instance, ma’am, we’ll suppose you to be a horse, and that you are troubled with cracked heels.”

Here again the mirth broke out, in spite of all endeavours.

“I understand, Mr. Philpot, you mean chilblains. I have them very badly in the winter.”

“Well, ma’am, I should first turn you into a loose box, and then put your feet in an old worsted stocking.”

“I should prefer lamb’s wool, if it is all the same.”

“Quite the same, ma’am, and then I should fill it all under the heels and round the coronet joint, with carrots boiled to a mash, and tie it carefully above the fetlock.”

“I understand perfectly, except the fetlock; but I suppose it is a medical term for the ankle. Our friends have some joke amongst themselves that will hardly let me hear you. The ankle, I believe?”

“Just so, Mrs. Toogood, and the application should be repeated three times a day, just before feeding time.”

“Breakfast, dinner, and tea?”

“You may call them so, ma’am, but they should consist of nothing but bran mashes, with a little nitre, and in less than a week you will be as fresh as a four year old.”

“As a child four years old.”

"Just so, ma'am ; and then with a little green meat——"

"Bless me, they make such a noise ! A vegetable diet, I suppose ?"

"Just so ; only we call it green meat ; and then, after a turn-out to grass for five or six weeks, we shall catch you up and give you three drachms of Barbadoes aloes, compounded with oil, and weighing about two ounces, but not measuring more than one inch in diameter and about three inches in length."

"Dear ! Isn't that a great deal to swallow ?"

"Oh, not at all, with our new method. We never use the balling-iron, which is a sort of pop-gun, but hold the tongue with one hand and push the pill down with the other."

"Surely ? Is not that very dangerous ?"

"Not a bit. You can't bite when I've got you by the tongue. Nothing then remains but to watch its passage down your gullet, and, if it sticks, just to give you a tap under the chin and a few gulps of water. A little walking exercise, and a gentle trot or two, will then complete the cure, and only make you a trifle too frisky."

"Wonderful ! I wish they wouldn't be so noisy, for I have lost half of your prescription ; but I am determined to try it."

Tom was beginning another dissertation upon how he should treat poor Mrs. Toogood for splints, curbs, and spasms, broken wind, and crib-biting ; but Lucy feared that her uncle had laughed rather more than was good for him, and begged leave to lead

him away for a quiet turn in the grounds; and Mrs. Toogood and Polly thought they should like to do the same, the latter having overheated herself with hemming and coughing. Tom jumped up in polite haste to open the door, in which evolution he overturned his chair, and had a narrow escape of slipping upon the floor, and returned to the table in a whirl of doubt as to the precise direction in which he had distinguished himself—upwards or downwards.

“I’m afraid, Mr. Crowley, I—I occupied a great deal too much of the conversation; but I didn’t know how to help myself.”

“On the contrary, you delighted us all very much!”

“No? Did I, though?”

“Certainly you did; my aunt especially; and next winter you may depend upon driving the doctor out of the house, and having the charge of her fetlocks all to yourself.”

“There now! You can’t help laughing at me! I meant the *horse’s* fetlocks. Did I say hers?”

“No—to be sure not. Why should you mistrust yourself when you saw you were such a general favourite?”

“Was I, indeed? I’m very glad to hear you say so, because I’m aware of my small claim to be thought anything but a country looby.”

“Looby! I wish it had been my own fate to be what you call a country looby. It would have saved me many years which have been lost in London

folly. But I have been making close observations, and can tell you that your country loobyism has had an effect of which you appear to have never dreamt."

"Really? What can that be?"

"Are you so blind that you have never perceived the particular interest you have awakened in a young lady who has just left the room?"

"You don't say so! What—Miss Longland?"

"Well, I am not quite so sure about Miss Longland; but I am certain about Miss Lightfoot."

"Miss Lightfoot! That's impossible! We have known each other for years, and have been just like brother and sister."

"And that is just the reason which makes it the more possible. She has had time to learn all your good qualities, and to know them better than you do yourself."

"But I thought she was out of all patience with me whenever I said a word."

"Then you do her great injustice; for her want of patience was a burning anxiety that you should gain the admiration of everybody else. I never saw a pretty girl betray her feelings so unmistakably."

"Well, I *am* surprised! But surely Miss Longland seemed more amused?"

"She was amused, no doubt; but that might have been from a lively imagination of my aunt in a loose box, feeding upon bran mashes."

"Ah, there again! You can't keep from laughing!"

"At my aunt, my good friend, at my aunt, who

showed such a strong desire to become ‘too frisky!’ All that you said was excellent. But what I should chiefly consider, if I were you, is, whether I had not better take the good the gods provide me, before it takes ‘a gentle trot’ with somebody else. I am confident you have no grounds for a shadow of doubt, and that Miss Lightfoot would be as happy as yourself.”

Tom was too much amazed to take another drop of wine, and in a few more minutes they got up to join the ladies. Tom in a new world, and Crowley in a great deal better mood than he had recently felt for the old one. Whatever might be his fortune with Lucy, there was no fear of rivalry, and no compunction to be entertained for honest Tom.

CHAPTER II.

A N opportunity for further observation on the two young ladies was not long wanting ; for though aunt Toogood had come to Oakendell very fully impressed with her responsibility for the peace of mind of her nephew, and resolved to stand between him and Lucy like the wall between Pyramus and Thisbe, with the hole bricked up, she had seen enough at the dinner table to form a very different conclusion from that which he expressed to Tom, at the end of the last chapter, and to feel that her duty need not be quite so unremitting. Polly had listened to Tom's brilliant *debut* with an impatience so discouraging that it was manifest she could not bear him ; whilst Lucy had never appeared to enjoy any conversation so much, and was, of course, devoted to him. If James was not convinced by demonstrations so obvious he must be impervious to all other argument, and therefore she felt justified that evening in leaving the garden, with all her responsibilities, to make the tea.

Soon after she was gone, the Vicar began to feel

he had done enough for the day, and the last gleam of the starry twilight reminded him that it was time to go to bed. He was leaning on the arms of Lucy and Crowley, and they led him towards the house ; the remaining pair engaging to await their return.

Tom had been tingling to be left alone with Polly, though he had scarce courage to guess why ; except that he now looked for a candid opinion of the figure he had made.

“ It was very good of you, Miss Polly,” he began, “ to warn me with so many hemps, but I’m afraid I was too stupid to profit by them as I ought to have done, and as I hope to do in future ; for I believe everybody was laughing at me and thinking what a clown I was. I wish you’d tell me your real opinion.”

Polly had determined to give him a good scolding for having begged her advice and then taken himself into his own hands, but as he owned his fault so penitentially she had not heart to vex him more. Besides, she was in happy spirits. It was the first time she had seen Crowley and Lucy together, and she had made observations as well as the rest, with a conviction that Lucy could not long hesitate in removing whatever obstacles impeded her way to happiness. There might also have been some slight increase of indulgence for honest Tom, who seemed to be puzzling out the nature of certain sensations which had very long perplexed him.

“ My real opinion, Mr. Tom, is that you are coming

out in the world with immense success ; and that, if everybody laughed, it was only at Mrs. Toogood, and the amusing manner in which you played upon one of her most prominent sagacities. Nothing could have been more witty.”

“ Wit ! you don’t say, Miss Polly, that I have been witty ?”

“ Of course ; and very much so.”

“ Well now, if you’ll believe me, I had not the faintest idea of it, and was going to ask whether you didn’t think I had better hold my tongue in company.”

“ No, Mr. Tom ; I don’t think any such thing. What I think is that a life of indolence makes us believe ourselves inferior to others, when a very little exertion would reverse the case.”

“ Really ? I wish I were confident of that ! I’m afraid you are too good natured.”

“ If I must find fault, I should say that confidence is all you want ; and that, in the society to which your acquaintance here will introduce you, it may be very soon acquired. We have only to feel that those who desire our company desire us to enjoy theirs in our own way ; to be under no nervous idea that we are expected to talk when perhaps we have nothing to say ; to suit our conversation, as far as we can, to the taste and comprehension of our listeners ; to prefer hearing their conversation to dazzling them with our own ; and to remember that self-display is the sure road to mortification.”

“ Go on, Miss Polly ; I shall not forget a word.”

"What I most wish you to remember is my recommendation to use a little more exertion, and be on better terms with yourself."

"I will, Miss Polly. I will, positively. Mr. Crowley advises me to take to reading, and gives me the run of his library. The only mischief is that I don't know where to begin, unless you help me."

"We shall be fellow-students, Mr. Tom, for he has given me the same privilege. We went to see it when we left the dining-room, and you cannot think how comfortable it is."

Tom was convinced it would be very comfortable indeed; and they strolled on till they could not see their way, and Polly wondered where they had got to, and what had become of Lucy and Mr. Crowley. They had, indeed, followed the windings of a wild shrubbery for nearly a quarter of a mile, and quite forgotten their promise to remain where they had been left; and so they turned, though neither of them showed much desire to quicken their pace. They had never held such long and confidential communications before, and Polly was proud to find, or to think she had found, in Tom some glimmerings of intelligence a good deal in advance of the stock for which she had given him credit, while Tom was equally interested in trying to make out why he could so freely display his deficiencies to Polly when he shrank from the penetration of every one else. The indolence which had marked his character on all other sides had bleared his perceptions even on this, and perhaps he would have remained

purblind a great deal longer had not the opinion of Crowley, like the ninth day of a blind puppy, partially opened his eyes. They were not open enough for more than a peep ; but that, for Tom, was a great beginning.

In the meantime Lucy had paid her uncle the last attentions for the night, and returned with Crowley to rejoin the couple they had left. Finding them gone from the spot, they seated themselves upon a bench beneath the honeysuckle of a tangled thorn ; both perhaps a little conscious of the romantic influence of a wild and beautiful scene, only lighted by the stars and glow-worms, and breathing odours upon the balmy atmosphere of August. Such positions, on their first occurrence, are apt to be embarrassing when there are only two to feel them, and each of these two is profoundly convinced that the whole earth cannot find an equal to the other. Lucy seemed apprehensive of she scarcely knew what, perhaps, and soon commenced talking, as if she felt there was something to be dreaded in silence.

“ This,” she said, “ is the first moment I have found to thank you for your goodness and timely protection to my old friend, Mrs. Rokins. Mr. Cheek will hardly venture to molest her again, after the lesson which she tells me he received at your hands.”

“ I have heard of other molestations,” he replied, “ which required a stronger one ; and, with a few words to guide me, he shall very soon learn it. I

have heard that on my aunt's interruption of his wondrous insolence, his manner had been extremely menacing, and I have heard more since. There is in this Cheek something unintelligible which we must bring to light.

The calmness of Lucy's manner was visibly confused, notwithstanding a strong effort to maintain it ; and, for a moment, she appeared at a loss what to say. She then endeavoured to avoid the subject as one not worth their attention.

"Do not," she answered, "let the hideous apparition of that man disturb the delightful close of this happy day. He knows perfectly well that he can never dare to repeat his offence ; and I am anxious that so great a shame to me may not become more public."

"But it is widely public already, otherwise I could not have known it, except from you or my aunt, whom I have not seen since the outrage until this day ; and he is base enough to give his own colour to it, and to say that he only acted from encouragement. To bear this tamely might be a serious disadvantage to you. I can understand the reluctance you feel to confess the insults to which you have been subjected by your father's servant, but this is a case in which silence would be infinitely worse than exposure. Whatever he may have threatened, I conjure you to confide it to me, and you will not doubt my promise to take no steps upon it without your entire approval."

Lucy's answers to much more pressing of this

kind were not natural to her character, for they were evasive and only calculated to create doubts of her sincerity, which Crowley might have unintentionally shown by his manner. She could not endure to imagine this, and at once made up her mind to be explicit.

"Mr. Crowley," she said, "I have thanked you for only one of my deep debts. What do I not owe you on the part of my poor uncle—even for his life? For the postponement of that miserable day when I must be desolate? For the hope, the calm, the almost happiness, which you now afford me? With all this obligation on my mind, is it possible that I can consider you as the mere friend of a month? That I would not trust you as freely as the friend of my whole life, if I had such a friend? I will prove my confidence. I will confess to you what I never confessed, and never will, to any human being—that *there are things which I must never speak of*. You are too generous to press or misjudge me."

"You know that I can never do either. But remember always that you are young, and that you have seen nothing of the world and its duplicities; that your goodness and simplicity of heart are your greatest impediments in meeting them with safety. You may be unhappy for your whole life, though the remedy may be found in a moment."

"I feel," she replied, "that my confession has given you good reason to regard me with doubt;

but I depend, as I have said, upon the generosity of which I have experienced so much. Deep, indeed, would be my grief if I taught you to think of me unfavourably, or change the tone of interest which I can hear from no one else. Let me hope that I shall not have this to bear, and that I have not added the misfortune of offending you to those which, heaven knows, are already too many."

She held out her hand with a frankness which, under different circumstances, would have conveyed a transport, but he took it now as a token of farewell.

"That I can ever change the tone you have permitted me to assume, you cannot believe; or, if you do, I must drive such delusions from your mind by persisting still further beyond the bounds of common interest. Without attempting to penetrate that mystery in which you admit no participation, you must forgive me for reminding you that mysteries are dangerous for all of us, and especially for the more delicate portion. The world is too prone to adopt the worst construction. That which we hide from all is by all suspected to be hidden from its unfitness to see the light, and what is most innocent is daily distorted into shapes that frighten us. Had a door in this house been locked, with no key to be found, it would most assuredly have shut up some evidence of a murder."

"I know it; and many a tear have I shed for the cruelty to which I am compelled to expose myself. But I must learn to bear it. If, like most girls of

my age, I had such family connections as might be affected by any opinions that may be formed of me your arguments would be unanswerable; but, excepting my uncle, I am alone in the world. Knowing and known to none but one or two friends who, like yourself, will not believe me capable of anything they would condemn; and those who know me not will scarcely think me worth their remarks."

"Do you not forget that if Providence sometimes denies us other claimants upon our duty it never absolves us from the duties we owe to ourselves, and that the foremost of these is to accept such happiness as it may be pleased to offer? There are other relations in life which are generally held as dear, or more so, than those you have mentioned; and, of a certainty, they will be at your disposal. Say now, could you reconcile it to yourself to withhold a thought when none would be withheld from you? To maintain a needless reserve where the chief object in life would be to supply the absence of all of whom nature has deprived you?"

"Such relations as you allude to can never be mine. My life must be lonely, and my death have none to lament it."

"But you have a father whose views may be less mournful."

"Alas! if I have a father, I know it not. I have doubted it for years, and recent events have gone far to assure me. Say nothing of my father if you would spare me an agony I cannot bear!"

"Forgive me! I have been too earnest. Allow

me only a few more words to excuse it. Judge yourself if I have been warranted by the reasons which I will now give you, and which I have only learnt since I last saw you. They will show you the advantage prepared to be taken of your want of protection ; the horror to which you are personally exposed, and the wrong in more worldly matters, which it strongly indicates."

" What horror," she replied, " can be intended beyond that which I have already experienced ? And, for worldly matters, what wrong can be redressed for one who can prove no right ?"

" Listen, and hear what I witnessed only two or three nights ago, on the very spot where you had afterwards such good cause to mistrust this security. What I heard—what I heard myself—was nothing less than a bargain between your agent and another miscreant to buy and sell you for a bribe to be regulated, as it seemed, by the profits of the speculation. This surely is enough to prove your probable need of assistance in the secret never to be breathed. But of that I say no more. Of Cheek's confederate I have discovered that he is the worst of a bad class ; well known in the betting ring and gambling house ; the spoiler of unwary imbecility that is proud of distinction amongst rogues and vagabonds ; the obliging friend who shows them where to borrow when all is gone, with a view to cheat them of their last hope ; the oracle of foolish lords ; the idol of money lenders ; and the bosom friend of thieves. Such is the person who professes

to be in correspondence with you ; to have been the object of your visit to London ; who was present at your departure ; who is now using, for the purchase of the last treasure of your family, the wealth pillaged from your father, and inherited from the arch villain Downton."

Lucy had trembled more violently at every word of this speech ; but when he came to Mr. Badger's account of the quarrel and mutual menaces that had passed at his office, and the natural surmise that they must in some way have related to transactions in connection with her father, she shuddered and sank back upon her seat, unable to make any answer beyond holding up her hand to implore he would proceed no farther.

However prepared for some strong demonstration of feeling, Crowley had expected nothing like this, which was so far disproportioned to surprise or indignation that they appeared to vanish entirely before sensations very far deeper. He would have gone on with his relation to what he had heard of Aaron Daunt, but had confounded himself almost as much as he had overcome Lucy. Here was some unknown ground on which he feared to tread ; and the silence continued till Lucy herself was the first to break it.

" You have reason," she said, " to form no favourable thoughts of me, but I would not have you believe me deceitful. I have told you frankly that there are subjects I must never speak of, but the person whose character I have no doubt has been

correctly described to you is not one of them. That he wrote to me is true ; that I went to London in consequence is true, and that he has asserted a false motive for it is highly probable. This is all I must say of one whom it has pleased my fate to connect with all I must not say ; excepting that the absence of all recognition of him, which you witnessed on our departure, was for no purpose of deception, but intended to be final. Imperfect as this story may be, it is all I can tell. You are one of the only two in whom I would repose so much, and here is the other.”

As she concluded, they were joined by their two friends, and the interruption soon restored her composure sufficiently to return to the house. Crowley contrived that she should do so in company with Tom, whilst he retained Mary Lightfoot for another turn in the garden.

“ You have had some explanation,” said Polly, “ and Lucy has fully satisfied you.”

“ She has,” he replied, in a tone unexpected. “ She has admitted everything that Cox boasted of; is in no way disturbed at his negotiations with Cheek, and was alarmed beyond measure at a quarrel they have had, from fear, I believe, of the revelations that may follow. So here my interference ceases, and with it a vain dream from which I am now fully awakened.”

“ On my life, you are now first beginning to dream ! If Lucy had dishonoured herself by a thought of Captain Cox, what need had he to purchase the connivance of Cheek ?”

The argument was vain. All facts are easily accounted for in the summing up of a one-sided judge, and who, of the over sensitive nature of Crowley, under circumstances that might have troubled heads much cooler, can be anything else? Having, with the usual readiness of disappointed hope, convinced himself that Lucy's extreme agitation could only have arisen from some lover's quarrel, and that Cheek was employed to make it up, it was easy to trace her mystery to despair of any happy relations with a lover enriched by the ruin of her own father. Yes, the explanation had been satisfactory; but it was not so to Polly Lightfoot, who did not scruple to comfort him with the assurance that he was absolutely out of his mind. He would have been too rejoiced to believe her, but unfortunately, like most demented folks, he was obstinate in believing himself.

"Say no more," he besought her. "Miss Longland refuses to speak farther, and to what purpose should we? Let this be the end of it. We must do nothing to deduct from any pleasure her visit here may afford her, and I make an earnest request that you will, from this moment, forget all that has passed."

His manner was not less decisive than his words, and it was clearly no time to reason with him, though a doubt of Lucy, from any other source, would have kindled Polly's quick spirit into a blaze, but she pardoned Crowley as an overwrought devotee at the shrine of her own worship.

"If you will not dismiss these phantoms," she

concluded, “you will at least promise me not to let them appear, for Lucy has sorrows enough. We shall not be here [long before your mistakes bring you worse reproach than mine. I engage, for both your sakes, to breathe no word of them, and to give you a faithful account of all that I observe. In the mean time we know not what changes may be made by the return of Aaron, and by another quarrel which you have yet to expect between Cox and his confidential agent, Mr. Fozzard. You will promise to suspend your judgment?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Yes—I promise anything. But let us say no more. We talk of phantoms!”

And so, without more words, they returned to the judicial presence of Mrs. Toogood, who, having cross-questioned the looks of all the suspected parties, was satisfied that her cherished nephew’s pulmonary tendency was in no danger from the effects of a hopeless attachment.

CHAPTER III.

CROWLEY'S resolution to discard every hope of the last month did not desert him the next morning, nor for many mornings after, though it was by no means easy to maintain, for in proportion as the daily failure of any change in Lucy more firmly established it, the daily development of some deeper claim to his devotion knocked it down, and then again the absence of all the promised aid from Polly obliged him to repair damages. Polly, indeed, had received no confidence to remove his doubts, and more than one unaccountable circumstance transpired, which might have gone a great way to confirm them. She was too prudent to speak of what she could not understand, and nothing could have shaken her enthusiastic opinion, but she felt that the something which Lucy had admitted to Crowley as holding a malign influence over her past and future life—the something which was no secret to such persons as Cheek, Cox, and Aaron Daunt—ought not to be withheld from him. It was some evil, recollected or apprehended, which haunted her more fearfully than any of her known misfor-

tunes, of which the bitterness might be said to have been tempered by time and tears. To these, in their close companionship, she could sometimes allude with the calmness of settled grief, but the *something*, dismissed for the moment, would flash up like an apparition, with all the vivid terrors of a first appearance—a thing for ever new, though for ever returning. At such times she would stop with a shudder, whatever the conversation, and hurry away to recover herself in solitude. Once or twice she was followed and found upon her knees, or pale and convulsed with tears over a packet of letters. She had also, once or twice, been observed to steal out for a lonely stroll in the grounds or in the forest, and to return without a hint that she had left the house. Could it have been for the mere enjoyment of solitude? If not, whom did she hope to meet? Surely not that incomprehensible Aaron Daunt, with whom she had held a scene so adapted to the darkness of the Vicarage garden?

Such occurrences were not frequent, or of sufficient duration in their passage to attract any eyes but Polly's. Mrs. Toogood made it a rule to see nothing beyond her own imagination; the Vicar was incapable of seeing anything at all, and Crowley had seen enough to decide him upon looking no farther. His manner towards Lucy was the same as it had been when he was full of hope, for he was the same himself, though he had none left. He had nothing to do but to make his house happier than its master, and he would quite have succeeded had his inward

disquietude been less surely understood where he most wished to disguise it.

To contribute his modicum to this effort, Tom Philpot came every day—for it was now the month of September—to shoot with Crowley, who was glad of any means of distraction; for it was only to Tom and the poor old Vicar that he could now look for them. The first, indeed, would have been a fair antidote to low spirits, had there been no other reason than the havoc which Polly had made in him. He looked as sentimental as any young lady could desire, and laboured hard at his educational tasks; but he never could quite charm away that nervous little cough, which had become as well understood by the rest of the party as it was by himself; and he had not only to bear his punishment, but the laughter it caused. The consequence was that, though smart enough in bagging his double shot in the field, he never could steady his more important aim in the house. All his faculties were in a tangle, like his pocketful of fish-hooks; and though the bird showed no inclination to fly away, he never could find courage to pull the trigger.

But Tom had another cause for hesitation. He had given away so much of his substance for the comfort of others that he had very little left for his own. He had too good a heart to think of this when he was “fancy free,” and it was not till he found himself in a plight far different, that he began to dot-up the penalties, and to consider that the little which was not enough for one could hardly be

enough for two. The addition of a hundred a-year, or thereabouts, which was the fortune of pretty Polly, was, no doubt, something, and he did the abstruse sum of tacking it on to his own hundred-and-fifty, till, like Iago's invention, calculation "came from his head, like birdlime from frieze and plucked-out brains, and all." Sometimes a hundred a-year, augmented by a hundred-and-fifty, made a total in accordance with Messrs. Cocker and Bonnicastle, and sometimes he put the 100 first, and made the total 100,150. The worst of this arithmetical fever was its intermittence, which was generally filled up by a severe attack of common sense. On these occasions he felt he had but two or three alternatives, all equally unfeasible. The first was to cool his ardour; the next was to convince himself that a proposal, backed by a hundred-and-fifty pounds a-year, would not be at all presumptuous; the third, to find some profitable occupation, without knowing what, where, or how; the fourth, to retrench his expenses, which, as they already amounted to nothing, was quite as hopeless as the others. To be sure, he *did* indulge himself with a pack of hounds, but then they were good enough to quarter themselves all over the parish, and only cost him a blast of his horn to assemble, and a crack of his whip to disperse; and this could hardly be called extravagance. He was in a dead-lock, for he could only find a fifth alternative in tearing his hair and reading his book upside down.

He, however, continued to do his best in pro-

moting the general pleasure, which he often did very effectually, by fixing the meets of the Philpot hounds under the Oakendell windows, where he had the advantage of convincing pretty Polly that, hem as she might at his other accomplishments, there was no hemming at his horsemanship. He had the choice of Crowley's stable, where every horse could cross the country at a crow-flight, and he turned out in the true style of Melton. Around him were assembled his best fields of agricultural sportsmen, on their big-bellied swish-tails, and Daniel Boocock never failed to do him a good office among the admiring ladies by loudly proclaiming that Squire Thomas meant to show them the way, and no mistake ! Daniel was quite right ; for the rabble that congregate, like crows to a carcase, at anything in the hunting way, no sooner beat a hare out of a bush, than tow-wow went the horn, and away went Squire Thomas, at the tail of his pack, rating Hector and Andromache for not being “ Forward, forward ! ” Riding over Jupiter and Juno, and half the gods of Olympus, and, what was more, over every fence in his way that afforded a fair chance of *felo-de-se*. Away and away to the farthest hedge and ditch ! And away went two or three empty saddles and flying stirrups, and away staggered two or three fat farmers, waving their hats and shouting, “ Stop 'um, stop 'um ! ” Up the slope and along the headland scoured the screaming pack, Phœbus and Mercury leading the way with a deep bass, and Venus and Somebody-else yelping a shrill falsetto at their tails,

as if they were trying to hold on. Neptune and Vulcan and Towler and Howler, expostulating a field in the rear, at the merciless pace ; and a long train behind them of great sufferers from bronchitis and the whooping-cough. And so the exciting vision melted away, and the Vicar well-nigh jumped out of the window to be after them.

“ Go-o—along, Tom Roger ! ” he shouted. “ You took that gate like a spo-ortsman ! Sat back, and ga-ave your horse his head ! No da-aylight betwixt your saddle and—and—and—”

“ Ahem ! ” cried Mrs. Toogood, in imitation of Polly, and the chorus of admiration was universal.

But still the brilliant day brought its hero nothing but disappointment. Do what he could, Tom always found the horse too good ! There was no prevailing on him to commit murder, and he persisted in bringing his rider back without bruise or broken bone, and with the additional affliction of a hunter’s appetite.

The Vicar was a deeper source of interest, because his life was less insured ; but every day was more promising. He was slow in recovering his memory and articulation, but his health and strength were improving rapidly. He began to insist on being trusted to himself, and tottered about the grounds as pleased as a child that has just learned to walk ; looking about for recognitions amongst scenes which were all changed, and for persons who had long passed away ; wondering what had become of them, and mistaking every one he met for somebody else.

His talk, in which he took all occasions to indulge, was cheerful as it had been in his best days, but seldom coherent; sometimes shrewd, sometimes dreamy, though it often showed one hopeful token of improvement, which was a sharp watch of its effect upon those who listened, as if he mistrusted whether he spoke rationally. Such a reward to his unremitting care would have been enough for Crowley, with a fair balance to the outlay of much peace of mind; but he had other satisfaction, for which he was more exclusively indebted to his own influence.

Lady Goldfield, notwithstanding Crowley's depressing intelligence on his return from London, had not been unmindful of her engagement to make the acquaintance of Lucy. She could not be blind to the approaching ruin of her son, but was equally convinced that, since it must come, the sooner it came the better, for it was the only secure prevention of ruin far worse. She had therefore smoothed away the traces of sorrow, and driven to Oakendell the day after its company arrived.

The attraction between the young and the more mature beauty began from the first moment of their meeting. The sympathies of such natures are quickly understood, and Lucy almost felt herself transported back to the days of her hapless mother; whilst Lady Goldfield, in proportion as she succeeded in charming away the restraint of a novice in such society, was surprised to draw out sentiments and acquirements seldom found under the

best advantage, though sown as the winds will sometimes sow the flowers, in spots most remote from cultivation. She came often, and always with invitations to Goldsworthy, so that a day seldom passed without a drive in one direction or the other, and wherever else she went her constant theme was the praise of Lucy. Lucy's blush, which had so long glowed with shame at the Vicarage, became a blush of grateful pride, and, but for the one thought, would have mantled with delight.

Admiration from so envied a source soon excited ambition in the choicest families within visiting distance to be intimate with Lady Goldfield's favourite, and Oakendell, which had not heard a carriage-wheel for twenty years, was now scarcely ever without its group of distinction. Nor was Polly Lightfoot without her share of attention, for she was another blossom of those wind-sown flowers, which, if it somewhat differed from the hues of the first, secured her friends and admirers who would have very much amazed sister Pen, descended as she was from the Book of Kings.

And so passed a month or more, which would have been perfect sunshine to Crowley but for the cloud which Lucy never dispelled. He rejoiced in having been the means of restoring her to the style of society to which she was born, and of raising pretty Polly beyond any hopes she could have formed. He had likewise lent a miraculous helping hand to honest Tom, by finding him an *entrée* to circles from which his family had always been

excluded ; and so polished him that many of the young ladies considered him quite as presentable as half the squires in the country. But what were these thoughts beyond so many resting-places on a journey that led him to nothing ?

To add to his troubles, the profound judgment of Mrs. Toogood was becoming alarmed for her two interesting young charges, who appeared to have made, during the whole month, no advance toward the destiny she had fixed for them. Supposing the scarce supposable case that she had made a mistake, the mode of life they were now enjoying must be highly injurious to both of them, as neither could aspire to a better establishment than some small curacy or decent farm-house. It was time to remove them from such dangerous risks of delusion ; and so she determined to secure their happiness by taking them back to the miseries of Broome Warren. It was not, however, in accordance with her strict rules of good breeding to give this reason ; especially as there were others in the demoralized state of the neglected village which was going to ruin from want of her superintendence. No one could dispute the ruin, however all might doubt the remedy, and the day was named for her departure. An event not too distressing as it regarded herself, but very much so as it regarded her two young friends, who could not remain in a house without a mistress.

But Lady Goldfield had planned an alternative against which even Mrs. Toogood had nothing to urge ; and this was a pressing desire that the rest of

the inmates should end the summer at Goldsworthy. The invitation was, of course, joyfully accepted, notwithstanding the peril of increased disrelish to the small curacy and decent farm-house, and Mrs. Toogood shook her head in silent despair that everybody in the world was determined to go wrong, in spite of all she could do.

Under these grave forebodings came the afternoon when Lady Goldfield was expected to dine, and then take away the Vicar, and Lucy and Polly, leaving Crowley to bid a melancholy farewell to his aunt on the following morning, after which he was resolved to pay another visit to Lord Goldfield to ascertain what he was doing; for, excepting a hurried and provoking line or two in reply to his letter from London, which Cox had been suffered to prove a mistake from end to end, nothing had been heard of him.

Lady Goldfield had disguised her suffering with the courage of the Spartan boy, and had never renewed a subject upon which depended events only known to herself. What these might have been we will not stop to enquire, for they were very near at hand.

We now come to a few small rapids which may carry us into deeper water.

CHAPTER IV.

SAILING under the pilotage of a young lady not yet introduced, we have to describe her as a pretty, demure, and rather sly-looking production of Broome Warren, enjoying all the valuable confidence of Mrs. Toogood, and brought up under her watchful eye to the delicate duties of lady's-maid, Betsy—or Miss Betsy, for such was the respectful addition to her name in the servants' hall—being indispensable to her mistress, had been conveyed beside the footman in the rumble of that lady's carriage from the Rosary to Oakendell, where we have no doubt she was much admired by the gentlemen in waiting as a charming flower of the forest. Perhaps the frequent repetition of this complimentary metaphor made her rather fond of those flowers, for her favourite pastime was wandering about in search of them, whilst the rest of the house were engaged in dining and attendance.

But on the afternoon we have now to speak of, she indulged in a romantic ramble before the usual

hour, when the sun was high enough to distinguish her fair features from the rural maidens who might occasionally be seen in quest of their cows or sweethearts, and therefore she turned her modest course into a very shady lane, not far from the house. Here she had the shock of meeting a gentleman on horseback, who appeared to be as romantic as herself, for he was riding backwards and forwards and looking in all directions, as if for some figure appropriate to the landscape. When Miss Betsy appeared he trotted briskly up to her, with—we must confess—a not very romantic salutation.

“Why, Betsy,” he said, “you plaguy little jade, I have been waiting for you more than an hour.”

“Hush!” she replied, with a finger on her lips. “Don’t speak so loud. Why didn’t you fix an hour or two later?”

“Because I couldn’t. I am on my way back to London, and had a hard matter to get down to-day. What is this news you have got for me?”

“Didn’t you receive my letter?”

“Yes; you tell me they are going away from this; but when?”

“Why, to-night.”

“They are! Where are they going?”

“Mrs. Toogood and I to the Rosary; the rest on a visit to Lady Goldfield.”

“Crowley and all?”

“No. His servant says something bothers him,

and he's going I don't know where. We all think Miss Longland has refused him, so perhaps she likes you better."

"Refused him, has she!"

"So they say. I'm sure I shouldn't!" and Miss Betsy tittered sweetly. "You had better make haste, or she may change her mind."

"Why, Betsy, you see I don't know anybody in the house but the master of it, and him I don't want."

"I thought you captains were never afraid. But then, to be sure she's going away to-night, and they are all in a bustle, getting ready."

"What sort of a person is Lady Goldfield?"

"A very nice one. Why don't you get introduced?"

"Aye, but there's another difficulty. I am not acquainted with anybody she is likely to know, except her son; I know him well enough, but his introduction, I suspect, would not do me much good."

"Perhaps I know somebody that will do better; and that's why I wrote to you."

"Whom do you mean?"

"My missis."

"But I don't know *her!*"

"But I do." And Miss Betsy tittered again. "When are you coming back, or where am I to write?"

"To the old place. But what are you thinking about?"

"Oh, never mind. I'll do something which I have no time to tell you now. Hark!" and she peeped fearfully through the bushes, prepared to vanish at the first tap of the woodpecker. "I can't stay any longer," she resumed in a breathless whisper, "I've got to help them pack up."

"Stop a moment. To pack up, do you say? You told me the last time I saw you, that Miss Longland passed most of her time in reading a parcel of old letters; and as there is a good deal in her which I can't understand, I should like very much to see them. Do you know where she puts them?"

"Do you want me to steal them?"

What a shock to Betsy's principles.

"No, no—only just to borrow them. She might easily think she had left them behind, and then you know you could send them after her."

"Oh, that's all—only to borrow them! I declare you frightened me. Well, I saw her put them away this morning in the bottom of her box."

"Then she might have them again before she missed them. Perhaps they may tell me something I want to know about family matters, and teach me how to be better friends with her. That's all. You may be doing her a service as well as me. Keep them till I come back, or—stay," and he mused a moment, talking to himself. "The races run to-day. Too late to get the first intelligence; and if I stop for to-morrow's, the letters may be missed and recovered, and the lucky chance gone. No, little

Betsy, I shall go back to the Longland Arms.
Bring them to me there."

"Not to the Longland Arms. That's too public. Do you see that chimney top over the trees yonder? Mrs. Toogood heard they were all thieves there, and has sent me every day to make them honest by giving them money to mend. One of the girls is coming to-night to wish me good-bye; and, as none of them can read, I may give her the letters till you send for them."

"That's my Betsy;" and he pulled out his purse and a letter. "Give her what you like out of this, and this letter to Miss Longland. And now something for myself," which might have been guessed from his stooping to put his arm round her neck.

"Let me alone; would you have us found out? Get along! get along! I hear a horse coming," and away the pretty innocent flitted, noiseless and fleet as a startled dove. Captain Cox also heard some one approaching, and cantered off in another direction.

The history of his friendly relations with Miss Betsy is very short. Mrs. Toogood, we have seen, was ambitious of advising the bodies as well as the souls of her neighbours; and, being as much in want of physic as philosophy, had long been in the habit of sending Betsy to Mr. Choke, the chemist, druggist, and apothecary, who was landlord to Mr. Fozzard. Mr. Fozzard, we remember, was a busy agent for the Captain who paid him frequent visits, and, of course, very soon winked himself into the good graces of his charming ally.

The horseman who had interrupted the conference was our friend Tom Philpot. He had been commissioned by Mrs. Toogood to bring her all the tidings he could collect of the present state of Broome Warren that she might not be too much shocked at its backslidings when she returned ; but when he entered the drawing-room his first look was directed to Crowley, as if he had something not meant for the rest. They were all, however, too anxious for their own news to allow any words in private ; and he began his report as grand almoner, vice Cheek superseded.

There was nothing very novel. He had made the round of all Mrs. Toogood's most promising protégées, of whom he found the houses empty and the beer shop full. The best of the young ladies was gone off with a travelling tinker, and the most respectable of the old ones was in the cage. Nobody had ever received more of her bounty from Cheek than about a shilling in the pound, which they had all suspected but never dared to betray, for fear of getting less. But as soon as they heard he was out of office there had been a great rebellion, his first appearance abroad having been greeted by such an ovation from the outlying nests of Mrs. Bloomer, that he had never ventured upon a second ; and perhaps this accounted for the extraordinary fact that he was going away.

“Going away !” cried everyone.

“Going away,” repeated Tom, “and here’s an advertisement of the sale of Green Lane’s End,

touched up in the style of Mr. Fozzard, who is now his most intimate friend, and never leaves his house."

With that he produced an imposing printed notice, which ran as follows:—

"To be sold, in consequence of the owner's projected removal to a residence more adapted to his avocations, the highly eligible property called Green Lane's End, situated within a short and charming walk of the delightful village of Broome Warren, newly erected and requiring a mere trifle for completion; together with the extensive farm and numerous out-buildings, easily convertible into conservatories, hot-houses, billiard rooms, or other decorative adjuncts, all tastefully dispersed in grounds admirably prepared for first-rate flower and kitchen gardens, the soil having been constantly enriched without regard to expenditure. The furniture, live stock, and manure to be taken by valuation. First-rate society, and the celebrated Philpot hounds within a quarter of a mile. For time of sale or price by private contract, enquire of Christopher Cheek, Esq., J.P., on the premises."

This magnificent effusion, which all who have had the misfortune to be house-hunters will acknowledge to be no exaggeration of the lucubrations which have tempted them hundreds of miles for similar endings, was hailed with a general thanksgiving, like the departure of the Great Plague.

Tom's next news related to Miss Pen, upon whom he had called at the desire of Polly to discover why

she had received no answer to any of her letters since they parted, but without success ; having been informed by Sprat that though Miss Lopy was very well she was very cranky, and wouldn't see nobody, because Fozzard was always a putting off the wedding and driving of her out of her senses.

The last intelligence was for Mr. Bloomer, and rather portentous. Mrs. Bloomer was in a state of distraction and tearing her hair all over the country in search of Jim Crow, who had been stolen from his perch, as she verily believed, by Mr. Cheek ; because no one else owed her a spite, and was only to be recovered by a search warrant, for which she was coming to Crowley, who had recently been made a magistrate.

“Co—co—coming here !” exclaimed the Vicar. “Let—let’s go and dress for dinner, and be off to Goldsworthy.”

The ladies agreed with him that it was getting late, and went off to their toilets, and then Tom turned to Crowley.

“I cannot dine with you,” he said, “though it is the last day. I have just met your keepers, who are going to watch for a poacher, and want me to help. But before I go I have something to tell you, which I thought you would rather hear in private. You remember you asked me, some time ago, to look out for a certain Captain Cox, whom you described, and a man named Daunt ?”

“You have not found them ?” demanded Crowley.

"I think I have found Cox, and almost in your own grounds."

"When?"

"Just now, as I was coming in, and, what's more, he has acquaintance in the house."

"Impossible!"

"It is quite true. He was in the shady lane, just by the gates, and leaning from his horse in earnest conversation with Mrs. Toogood's maid. I saw him give her a letter, and something from his purse, and just at that time he saw me, and galloped off."

"And the girl?"

"She couldn't get home without passing me, which she was doing in a great hurry, and as red as a poppy; but I thought it might be as well to stop her, and ask who the gentleman was. 'The gentleman, sir,' she answered, 'what gentleman?' 'Come,' I said, 'that won't do. I mean the gentleman you have just parted from.' 'Oh, him, sir! I don't know who he was, sir. Some stranger who asked me where that lane led to, and I told him I didn't know. That's all, sir. Mrs. Toogood is waiting to be dressed,' and in she scuttled, for fear of the next question."

Crowley was on fire.

"That meeting was pre-concerted!"

"No doubt of it. She had slipped out without hat or cloak. And now I must slip out myself, for the keepers are waiting for me, and said we must be quick. Good-bye. I will come to-morrow morning."

Poor Tom ! He had small conception of the consternation he left behind him, and made his way to the woods.

We know not what convulsion of human faculties could have produced a greater storm in the handsome visage of James Crowley. His first impulse was to rush out for his horse in pursuit of Cox ; but he was stopped by the recollection that Lady Goldfield was coming to dinner ; his next was to ring the bell, and order in Miss Betsy, but here came another recollection. A summons so unusual would create commotion, and doubts degrading to Lucy. He might rue his haste, and must take time to consider. This resolution being as fixed as all others under love's excitements are ever likely to be, he found his way up to his room, and in less than three minutes changed his mind, the second thoughts being inspired by a step passing his door towards that of his aunt. There is no mistaking the jerky progression with which a smart *femme de chambre* contrives to shake a whole house, and he could not resist the temptation to thrust out his head, and make a pounce upon her.

“ Stop a moment,” he said, taking her by the arm, “ I must have a little conversation with you, Miss Betsy.”

Miss Betsy would probably have giggled a feigned alarm if she had not had cause for a real one. She was seized with a sudden panting and trembling, but answered as we are told young ladies of that class are sometimes in the habit of answering—that

is to say, in accents not likely to alarm the neighbourhood.

"Oh, sir! For goodness sake, sir, do please let me alone! Missis is close by, and wants her warm water!"

"Never mind your mistress. Come in, and we'll shut the door."

"Oh, sir! Oh, don't!" and in she went, and the door was closed behind her. "Pray let me go, sir! Oh, do pray consider. If I was to be caught here, I should lose my character."

"Then don't make such a fuss about it, and answer me as glibly as you can. Who was that gentleman on horseback whom you met in the forest?"

"Gentleman, sir? Oh, mercy goodness!" and Miss Betsy would have preferred any sort of danger to the real one.

"You have nothing to fear if you tell the truth, and the truth you shall tell."

"Yes, sir! Oh, yes, I went to look for some honeysuckle for missis, sir—"

"Yes, yes, of course, and met the gentleman by accident, and all that; and now tell me who he was."

"Oh dear, sir, how should I know?"

"I don't say you *should* know, but I say you *do* know, so you had better save me the trouble of calling in Mrs. Toogood."

"Upon my word and honour, sir, I wouldn't deceive you for the whole world, but really and truly I know nothing at all about his name!"

"You don't?" and Crowley made a step to the door.

"Oh, stop, sir; stay—you have not heard me out! I was going to say I know nothing about him except what he told me himself; and that, you know, sir, mightn't be true."

Crowley touched the door-handle—

"Cox, sir, Cox! He said his name was Captain Cox!"

"Very good—and now, what else did he say?"

"I'm sure, sir, I don't remember; I was so confused!"

"He gave you a letter?"

"Did he, sir? Yes, sir; but I said I would have nothing to do with it; and then he told me it was only to put it in the post with the other letters of the house, because he was on his way to London, and mightn't have another opportunity; and so, sir, I threw it amongst them."

"Amongst those that had just arrived?"

"I'm sure, sir, I don't know whether they had just arrived or were just going out. You know, sir, I am quite a stranger."

"And that letter was addressed to whom? Come, don't tell me you didn't look."

"Oh, no, sir; of course I wouldn't tell you a falsity! One's eye naturally looks at a letter!"

"And I ask you again, to whom was it addressed?"

"Well, sir—yes, sir; I believe it was to Miss Longland, sir."

"And as the ladies were all upstairs, these letters have been taken to their rooms?"

"They may have been, sir. I don't know, sir."

"But you know something else—"

"Oh, sir! There's Missis's bell again!"

"Never mind. You know Captain Cox is staying somewhere near; and I must trouble you to tell me where."

"As I hope to be saved, sir, I don't know! No, not if I were to die for it!" And the protestations were persisted in till he was obliged to believe her. He then made her a present for the fright he had given her; with a promise of twenty times as much for immediate intimation of Cox's next appearance. And Betsy, undertaking most sincerely to be always on the watch, guaranteed her integrity by a hint, that if he should want her again, Mrs. Toogood would not keep her above twenty minutes.

With that, she opened the door with extreme caution; and, after peeping up and down the corridor to see that all was safe, took a first step or two upon tip-toe, and then marched with a bolder bounce to assure Mrs. Toogood that her first bell had not rung.

Being now fully assured that Lucy had received a letter from Captain Cox, Crowley was soon dressed and down stairs to observe what impression it had made upon her. But here he was less successful. The conversation with Tom, and afterwards with Betsy, had made him late, and the little party were all assembled, with the addition of Lady Goldfield.

If Lucy had any troubled feeling it was not traceable in her face, and she joined in the conversation with an ease from which he concluded, perhaps too readily, that a correspondence with Cox was nothing unusual. It would have been no greater strain of imagination to ascribe her rather melancholy expression to her approaching farewell to himself, and disregard and contempt for an insolent intrusion upon it; though her reserve on everything on which he most desired her confidence might form some excuse for him.

His impressions were no favourable preparation for a cheerful dinner party, but wounded pride will often supply the want of natural spirits with substitutes which pass off sufficiently well if not too closely examined, and he exerted himself that the last day in his house should be no exception to the many pleasant ones before it. If no one perceived the effort it might have been because all were making efforts of their own. Lady Goldfield might be thinking of a long paragraph in the *Times* of that day, with various prognostics of probable events at Doncaster. Lucy and Polly might have felt more flattered by less animation as the moment approached for their departure; and Mrs. Toogood might be revolving the perversity with which they preferred ruin to good advice; whilst the Vicar almost choked himself, under the delusion that the faster he eat the sooner he should escape the danger of a visitation from Mrs. Bloomer.

But the dispatch was not equal to the necessity,

and the spirits, however well assumed, were not fated to secure a very harmonious close to the day. The cloth had scarcely been removed and the Vicar helped to his first glass of claret, than he stopped in conveying it to his lips with a startled exclamation of—"There she is!" His ears, though deaf, were the first to catch a sound which had pierced them for a private entrance, and their correctness was soon established by a shrill expostulation with the butler and footman at the hall door.

"Not risen from table?" cried the well-known voice; "what's that to me! If people choose to dine when they ought to be at supper, whose fault is that? My business can't wait for anybody, and it shan't! Show me where he is, and never you mind whether he likes it or not!" And the door opened, and in swept the flounces and streamers of Mrs. Bloomer in her visiting overalls and a most magnificent state of anger.

"Where's Mr. Crowley?" she cried, without taking notice of anyone else. "Where is he? Oh, here he is! How d'ye do, Mr. Crowley? Here's fine doings in the parish! Fine doings, indeed! And I hear you are made a magistrate, and I want a warrant to take up Mr. Cheek, and I mean to have him transported, for he has stolen your godson, Jim Crow!"

The absurdity of this exordium, and Crowley's petrifaction, were not calculated to produce that sympathetic gravity which angry persons are in the habit of expecting, and Mrs. Bloomer loudly ex-

pressed her opinion that people had better laugh at their own troubles, and not trouble the troubles they were not asked to trouble themselves about. But, dignified as the rebuke was, it was not enough to suppress the offence, particularly in the Vicar, who was the greatest sinner of all, and alarmed poor Lucy with apprehensions of another fit.

Mrs. Bloomer, however, was not to be put down by such unseemly levity, and towered in a loftier flight of admonition to Crowley to remember that, since he was a magistrate, he should consider his house a court of justice, and keep the peace.

“If you don’t know your duty, Mr. Crowley, I must teach you. You have heard the charge, and have only to make out the warrant, and I’ll give it to the constable and have him locked-up in the round-house till we have leisure to send him to jail. There’s no hurry about that. The longer we take the better, because it will be a good example to the village. I have brought the documents in my pocket in which Mr. Cheek is his own accuser, in a correspondence as dirty as himself.”

“Then, my dear madam, if he is carrying on a correspondence in your pocket, for heaven’s sake keep him there for a more suitable time.”

“No, no; I’ve plenty of time now, and couldn’t think of keeping you in suspense. The case will make your reputation, and you must listen to it before he runs away, and obliges you to run after him to America or Jericho.”

“Quite enough,” said Crowley in despair, for he

saw the party had all heard enough, and were rising to retire. "We'll summon him to the Petty Sessions."

"Oh, but you haven't heard! I must read you the correspondence." And she tumbled about her overalls for something more like a sack than a pocket, from which a vigorous rummage produced two crumpled letters. "No!" she exclaimed to Lady Goldfield, "no, indeed, Mrs. Whoever-you-are, you must not go till you have heard whether I wrote like a lady. Of course, I couldn't present my compliments to a person who is anything but a gentleman; but I presented what he might take for compliments if he chose. Now listen—

"'Mrs. Bloomer presents her recommendations to Mr. Cheek to send back her game cock, who was last heard to crow on Mr. Cheek's premises, and was, no doubt, sold at his sale of live stock the day before yesterday. She recommends this the more strongly, because James Crowley, Esq., the new magistrate, intends to be particularly active against depredations, which might involve Mr. Cheek in considerable trouble.'

"There! could anything be more polite than that? Was it not kind and neighbourly to say I wished to keep him out of trouble? Well, what was the answer?"

She was obliged to make another emphatic ex-postulation before her audience became sedate

enough to take her peculiar views of politeness, and then proceeded :—

“ ‘ Mr. Cheek is greatly obliged by Mrs. Bloomer’s recommendations, and only regrets she has so few’ — there’s for you ! — ‘ He begs to assure her that, had her long-legged, white-feathered screech owl come raking his dung-hill for what he could not get at home, he should have had great pleasure in sending him home with his neck wrung, and his liver and gizzard under his wings, that James Crowley, Esq., the new magistrate, who intends to be so active against depredators, might assist her in picking his bones.’

“ There’s for you !” she concluded. “ Did you ever——” When, to her greater provocation, she found nobody in the room but Crowley, almost beside himself for some means to get rid of her. No plea of engagement to his visitors, or defective evidence or ignorance of the law could effect anything but a fresh gust of the hurricane. She herself was his visitor, and had as good a right as anyone else to claim his attention. She herself was evidence, and how could that be defective ? And as for the law, didn’t she know all about it, and wasn’t she the daughter of an attorney-general, and secretary of state to the Board of Guardians !

“ My dear madam,” exclaimed Crowley at last, and ringing the bell with desperation, “ it suddenly

occurs to me that we have a most capital clue to the perpetrator of this horrible crime. You say Mr. Cheek had a sale of his live stock the day before yesterday, and I observed this morning, that my servants must have bought up all the cocks and hens in the country. Depend upon it Jim Crow is amongst them ! Here's my butler to help you in the search, and discover who brought them ; and then you can come back to instruct me in the law."

Mrs. Bloomer was in triumph.

" Where are they ? Let me see them ! Get a lantern ! Now we shall have him ! "

She flung herself out of the door, leaving the butler just time to receive instructions not to bring her back till Lady Goldfield was gone ; and Crowley escaped into the drawing-room.

He found Lady Goldfield alone, and much amused by the incursion of Mrs. Bloomer.

" The rest," she said, " had gone to put on their cloaks, and Mrs. Toogood to deliver her last admonitions. And now, my dear James, pray don't distress yourself about the exhibition we have had, for nothing could have pleased me more. It is just what I wanted to justify a cherished project. You know how much I have been oppressed by the solitude of Goldsworthy since the marriage of my girls, and how I have longed for some young companion whom I could love, and to whom I could give the protection for which I had no object. Lucy has, from the first, been the very treasure I

desired, and I was only prevented from telling you so long ago by a compunction of conscience. I had never seen Mrs. Bloomer, and though I did not expect very much in her, it was hard to suppose she would feel the deprivation of a creature like Lucy so much less than the loss of your godson. But the scruple is now effectually removed, and if Lucy herself interposes no obstacles, she shall never return to such a home whilst I have one to afford her."

This was the fulfilment of a hope in which Crowley had long indulged—the completion of his care for Lucy, and the only reward he could now expect for it. She would be removed from a home of shame and misery, to refinement, admiration, and affection, under the most envied auspices ; and for this, at least, she would not forget him. It was all he could do for her, and all she could require. A consolation not too cheering, but still a consolation in his purposed endeavour to dismiss all recollection of the most painful episode in his history. He was warm in his approval of Lady Goldfield's intentions, and the more so, because he knew them to be partly formed in kindness to himself ; but there was still a perplexity from which he knew not how to release himself ; and this was his doubt whether, entertaining the suspicions which had been forced upon him, he was not bound to give some hint of them before Lady Goldfield arranged her plans finally. She saw that he had something to say, and likewise

his reluctance, in which she at once came to his aid.

“I see what is passing in your mind,” she said. “You are pleased with my project, but you think it precipitate, and are at a loss to say why; but I can answer without hearing you. When I first pressed this invitation upon Lucy, I thought she hesitated, for which I could not account, except by supposing that she wished to return to Mrs. Bloomer, which I knew she did not, and she would not leave me in doubt. She had learnt to feel like a child of my own, and went through the whole tale of sorrow which she had confided to you, as far as she had liberty, with all that you told her in return. So on that head you may spare yourself all pain. The reservation will not be long a secret; and, if she maintains it always, has not every one of us some reservation either for self, or more often, for others, which no generous interest could wish to penetrate? If I had a thorn, too deep for removal, would it not be cruel to attempt it?”

“She is truly happy, Lady Goldfield, in having won such confidence, and so am I in seeing it. But what, under this blessed change for Miss Longland, would be the fate of the Vicar?”

“If he never goes home I see he will never be missed; and poor Mary Lightfoot seems absolutely cast off by the Hebrew lady who delights to call her sister. Goldsworthy has rooms for all; and will, I hope, have so much the more temptation for yourself.”

Here Mrs. Toogood returned with her disciples, and the usual tag to their lecture, “which nobody could deny;” and Lady Goldfield’s carriage was heard drawing up to the door. All chance of a quiet word or two with Lucy or Polly, from one or the other of whom Crowley had still felt some faint hope of enlightenment on that letter, was lost for the present, which, to his troubled state, appeared for ever ; the terrified old Vicar being the most eager to cut the brief moment shorter.

“ Whe-ere’s Mrs. Bloomer ?” he inquired, with a hasty whisper.

“ Gone, my dear sir, to look for her game-cock. Will you take this chair ?”

“ N-o—no—thank ’e. Can’t wait. Ho-orses catch cold. Let’s be off.”

There was no prevailing on him to stay for his conjugal adieus, and the parting was hurried on all sides. Lucy held out her hand to Crowley, with a look which showed her aware of some change in him.

“ Mr. Crowley,” she gently said, “do not think me ungrateful. I owe you boundless thanks, and would pay you—if I could.” Her voice trembled, and she was almost in tears ; but Polly interposed, with her livelier tones, and reminded him that so short a move only called for good-night, and not farewell. The *not* was emphatic, and signified that her hopes were undiminished.

Lady Goldfield, having said her last words to Mrs. Toogood, then took his arm to the carriage. “ I

must not expect you to-morrow," she said, "nor the next day. You are going to find comfort for *me*, and perhaps I guess how I may find it for *you*. Hasten your return, and see how far I may be trusted."

And so the visit ended. The hints of confidence and comfort were lost upon him, and he strolled away into the darkness as if he would fain have lost himself also.

Mrs. Bloomer, having achieved that end more successfully in another sense, with the assistance of her guide, was now heard approaching the house, and proving her conversational powers very far from exhausted. The poor butler had much ado to keep step to the rapid tattoo upon the drums of his ears, and was excusing himself, as well as he could, for her bad sport,—not a cock or a hen to be found ! They must have gone off to roost in the forest, or the foxes had carried them all away, or the—the—he couldn't for the life of him tell what !

"Don't tell me !" she cried. "I don't believe there ever were any cocks or hens ! It was all a sham to get me out of the house, and leave Mr. Crowley to attend to other people when he ought to attend to his duty as a Justice of the Peace, and I'll take care he has no peace till he does it, and I'll have him turned out of office, with his cocks and hens, and let him see he is nothing more than a cockrell himself!"

And so she hurled her bedraggled flounces into the hall, where she found nobody but Mrs. Toogood,

standing majestically in the centre, like a statue of Minerva in her latter days, and heard nothing but the rapid roll of distant wheels, and her own vehicle jogging up to the door, with a rural Who-ho !

“ Why,” she exclaimed, “ goodness gracious me ! Where are all the people I want to speak to ? ”

“ Gone away,” replied Mrs. Toogood, with her mouth more out of drawing than ever, as much as to say, “ you are a horrible woman, and that’s my opinion. Gone away, Mrs. Bloomer. You can hardly suppose the Countess of Goldfield could stay to hear all this history about game-cocks, and livers, and gizzards.”

“ The Countess of Goldfield ! The very person I wanted to be acquainted with. Why couldn’t you tell me who she was, and let me pay her proper attention, instead of keeping her all to yourself, as if I was going to run away with her ? But where is Mr. Crowley ? Where is he ? For I insist upon seeing him.”

“ My nephew, I believe, is gone with the Countess.”

“ Gone ! and without giving me my warrant ! Gone ! and pretend to be a gentleman and a justice, when he knew I came all this way to teach him his duties, and had a right to expect his best thanks and extra civilities. Gone ! ”

“ Pray, Mrs. Bloomer, allow me to advise you—”

“ Advise ! Pray, Mrs. Toogood, keep your advice for those who want it ; and allow *me* to remark that

you give it to a great many people who don't. And so, ma'am, I have the honour to wish you a very good-night."

The ladies made two ceremonious curtsies, and Mrs. Bloomer bounced into her conveyance, with indignant orders to her driver to go home full gallop.

CHAPTER V.

NOT finding much enjoyment in his own company, and expecting still less in his aunt's, Crowley strolled back to the house as soon as he heard Mrs. Bloomer scolding her way homeward, and under pretext of a bad headache, went to his room in hopes his fatigue of mind might send him to sleep.

But the instructive discourse about the danger of wandering in the forest after dark, was not so easily evaded when Mrs. Toogood appeared at breakfast, in bonnet and cloak, with her travelling equipage waiting at the door.

"My dear James," she said, "I was never so uneasy in my life. You not only went out in thin shoes and without your hat, but in defiance of that dangerous poacher of whom you told us at dinner Mr. Philpot had gone in search. What would you have done if he had mistaken you for one of the keepers?"

"My dear aunt, I should have called you to help me."

"Ah, James! people of that class do not always

listen to advice. Our first duty is to take care of ourselves ; and I meant to impress it strongly upon Mr. Philpot, for he ought really to reflect that there is now another person to think of besides himself.”

“ And who is that, aunt ?”

“ Surely you must have perceived it is Lucy Longland. And there again I was prevented from speaking my sentiments by the extraordinary interruption of Mrs. Bloomer, for I had resolved that Lucy should not go away without such counsel as is always necessary for young persons of her age.”

“ And what counsel were you going to give her ?”

“ Of course, that it is high time this affair with Mr. Philpot should be brought to a conclusion, for nothing can be more injurious to a young woman than to be talked about.”

“ I quite agree with you, aunt, and shall not fail to act upon that excellent precept.”

There was something in his manner that revived Mrs. Toogood’s first fears for his peace of mind.

“ James !” she ejaculated, with solemn inquiry, “ I would not, for all the world, imagine that you have involved yourself in a hopeless attachment to Lucy.”

“ Then pray, my dear aunt, don’t imagine it ; for I can assure you that neither Tom nor I have the most distant idea of vexing her with any pretensions whatever. If you have any doubt upon the matter, you can ask Tom himself.”

“James!” exclaimed his astonished aunt. “My dear James! you surprise and alarm me! I cannot have been mistaken that Lucy is attached to somebody, and if it is neither to you nor Mr. Philpot it must be to somebody else!”

“A very probable conclusion, aunt. But, as I am not entrusted with any of Miss Longland’s secrets, I can give you no information. As they escape your penetration, perhaps she has none to penetrate.”

“Ah, James! I have had a great deal of experience. Young persons are never so mysterious except in affairs of the heart. They never appear with a forced smile on their lips and the traces of tears in their eyes; nor are they so fond of solitude, and so absent in society when it is both pleasing and instructive. I have had too much experience to be deceived!”

“Well, then, what think you of advertising in the second column of the *Times*: ‘If the gentleman who has now the heart of L. L. will apply to Mrs. T., at the Rosary, he will hear of something to his advantage.’”

“James, you should not make a jest of it! You have not known the miseries that are borne on the torrent of true love when it runs crooked!”

“I am sorry, aunt, that you should have known them so much better. I trust that with your experience in this torrent, you will take a hint from the Humane Society, and placard it ‘Dangerous.’ And you had better make haste, for we know not

how soon this torrent may sweep off the adventurer amongst the many dead dogs that have gone before him."

As Mrs. Toogood's Shakesperian dream was a little more mystified by these innovations, she stirred up her tea, and resumed in pathetic prose; declaring her deep sympathy with Lucy and the unknown object of her affections, who was, no doubt, a victim to his want of fortune, or his want of confidence; or, if not to these, assuredly to his want of something else, which made it her duty to learn all about him, and afford him every assistance in her power. The resolution did not attract that profound attention so due from inexperienced nephews to sagacious aunts, and if it had it might not have produced much faith in its operations; but Crowley might have looked a little more alive had he given a thought to what slight foundations have sometimes sufficed for very towering structures. She was soon thinking of something else, and Miss Betsy, having seen to the stowage, was about to display her pretty ankles in mounting the rumble, blushing and innocent as if a grain of suspicion would have crushed her into a drop of rose water. It was time for Mrs. Toogood to conclude her last chapter of lectures and pronounce the accustomed blessing.

"Now, James, be sure you never go out again after dark, and never forget to change your stockings after walking in the damp forest, for it is undeniable that you are predisposed to something

pulmonary ; and, if you can learn anything about the poor young man we have been speaking of, let me know immediately.”

“Certainly, aunt. I will keep a sharp look-out for him,” and he handed the good lady very carefully to her seat.

“And whenever you want advice, on any subject whatever, you will not forget the Rosary.”

“Of course not—of course not.”

“And pray see if Betsy is quite safe, and tell her to take care of herself.”

“I will, aunt. Do you hear, Miss Betsy ? Mrs. Toogood recommends you to take good care of yourself.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the innocent, in a voice distressingly modest. “I will, sir ; thank you, sir,” and the fat coachman awakened his drowsy horses, and rolled away.

It is not to be supposed that one so deeply concerned as Mrs. Toogood in the world’s welfare could afford to lose a whole half hour in gazing out of window, unless she had something to watch. After labouring a hilly half mile through the wilds, and losing herself in deeper mental labyrinths which led to nothing, she pulled the check-string, and required Miss Betsy to descend and take a seat beside her, which Miss Betsy did with some trepidation. She had not forgotten her scene with Crowley on the previous day, nor did she feel quite easy under his warning to take care of herself, and it was rather doubtful what her mistress might have to say. So

she sat up, very prim and pretty, with her hands in her lap, and her eyes upon a pair of delicate kid gloves, prepared for a small passage of tactics. Mrs. Toogood was prepared also to pick up a few fresh ideas, without betraying that such a head could have any want of them. She therefore adopted Mr. Tom Philpot's plan of stalking a wild goose (one of his improved efforts at dinner conversation, and *apropos* to a roast duck and green peas) by working round and round him, like the waves of his puddle, till he grows giddy and unconscious of the gradual approach.

After making Miss Betsy comfortable by a few words of patronage, and trusting she had derived benefit from the air of Oakendell, she condescended to ask how long Betsy had been with her.

"It is about three years, mem, since you took me from the school at which you were so good as to put me."

"I should have thought it longer, Betsy, from the great improvement you have made."

"Have I indeed, mem? I'm very happy!"

"You have become very discreet and well behaved, and more capable than most young persons, in all respects. You appear to be very observant, and I think you have learnt from me how to form opinions."

"I try, mem, as well as I can."

"I am sure you do, and I should like to see how you have succeeded. Now what is your opinion of the life at Oakendell?"

Miss Betsy dropped her eyes with great diffidence to make her first little tilt against the phantom loves of Tom and Lucy.

"My opinion is, mem, that Mr. Philpot and Miss Lightfoot are going on very comfortably."

"Miss Lightfoot! And what has he to do with *her*?"

"Law, mem, did you never know how long they have kept company?"

"Betsy, you astonish me! I never had the least suspicion that Mr. Philpot thought of her."

"Dear, mem, all the house knows he never thinks of anybody else!"

Mrs. Toogood was confounded. She had always considered that Mr. Philpot never thought of anybody but Miss Longland.

"Miss Longland, mem! Law, mem!"

"Are you certain it is not so?"

"Yes, mem, in course, mem. How could he be thinking of Miss Longland, when you know, mem, it would be of no use?"

"I don't know any such thing, Betsy! What can you mean? You must have some reason for saying so."

"In course, mem. I thought you knew all about it from Miss Longland, mem, and I never said anything, for fear you should think me taking liberties, mem!"

"Betsy, you must tell me everything you know, or I shall lose all my confidence in you."

"Oh, mem, pray don't frighten me, mem! If you

please to recollect, you sent me, just after Miss Lucy returned from London, to ask Dr. Choke for some homceopathic gobblies to cure a poor man who didn't know what was the matter with him."

"I recollect, Betsy."

"And then, mem, you sent me ever so many times for more, because they so soon made him find out. Well, mem, one of these times there was another nice gentleman in the shop—a very nice gentleman—who had come to see Mr. Fozzard, who lodges there, and Dr. Choke called him Captain Cox, and he was very civil, and asked a great many polite questions about *you*, mem, and was very glad indeed to hear you was quite well, mem."

"And how came Captain Cox to know anything about me ?"

"If you please, mem, he said he had heard of you from Miss Lucy, whilst she was in London."

"From Miss Lucy ?"

"Yes, mem, he told me he was second or third cousin to Sir Harry, and that she had been up to see him upon something of great consequence."

"Went to London to see him ! Betsy, you should have told me instantly ! Have you ever seen him again ?"

"Again ? Oh, yes, mem. Ever so many times. I saw him, accidentally, in the forest, a few days ago, when I was just taking a little walk to gather a few wild honeysuckles for your dressing-table, mem, and couldn't think at all how he came to be

there, till he told me he was waiting for Miss Longland."

"Mercy, Betsy! And had she given him any reason to expect her?"

"I can't say indeed, mem; but I suppose so."

"And was that the last you saw of him?"

"The last?" Betsy almost hesitated, for fear of being shocked by some suspicion of confederacy. "The last? Oh, no, mem; I was out, gathering a few more honeysuckles for you, mem, because the others had faded; and, by another most singular accident, I met him again yesterday."

"And was he again expecting Miss Lucy?"

"So he said, mem; and that he was dreadfully unhappy because they had nowhere else to meet, and his greatest fear in life was your disapproval, which would make him shoot, or poison, or drown himself. I forget which, mem, but I think it was all three."

The scales dropped from Mrs. Toogood's eyes—the sun broke in—what a blazing discovery! "Then this is what I never could understand in her! Poor, unhappy young man! Now, tell me, Betsy, where does he live?"

"I really don't know, mem; he says he never lives anywhere, because he's always dying! But, perhaps, I could find out from Dr. Choke."

"I shall write to him this very day. How providential a discovery! How fortunate that some have sagacity to spare, whilst so many are going to ruin from the want of it!"

"I'm sure, mem," said Miss Betsy, putting her little handkerchief to her eyes—for she was very sensitive—and speaking with a tremor which was quite as pretty as a titter. "I'm sure, mem, I don't know what the world would do without you! I believe you would give away all the sagacities you have and leave none for yourself."

Both Mrs. Toogood and the pretty maid she had so successfully educated fulfilled their benign intentions as soon as their return from a long visit afforded them leisure; the first writing very feelingly from the drawing-room, and the other scribbling rather funnily overhead; and both to the fortunate Captain Cox, with a joint invitation for the next morning. Miss Betsy added the pleasing intelligence that she had borrowed the letters and relieved her conscience as agreed, and that Mr. Crowley must by this time be a hundred miles out of the way. The two dispatches were then forwarded by a trusty messenger, to wit, Miss Betsy herself, to the care of Dr. Choke, who informed her that the Captain was at that moment very busily engaged with his friend, Mr. Fozzard.

As early as etiquette permitted, on the following day, a dashing cavalier pranced up to the Rosary and presented his card to Mrs. Toogood's butler, with the best respects of Captain Cox. Whilst he was gone the Captain dismounted, committed his charger to a stable assistant, pulled up his collar, stirred up his curls, and stared about him. In an upper window, peeping through the curtains, was

the sanctimonious Miss Betsy, not very sanctimonious just now, but laughing with all her might and main. An exchange of signals signified a clear coast and no danger, and when the butler returned with a polite request that Captain Cox would do Mrs. Toogood the pleasure of walking in, he obeyed with a condescending bow which sent Miss Betsy into fits.

As redundant wisdom is sometimes erratic and patience always limited, we must condense what followed into a few essential drops. Mrs. Toogood received the Captain with a smile of bland encouragement, and, pointing to a chair, said she was very happy. The Captain, obediently seating himself, said he was very proud; and they went to business. Mrs. Toogood expressing the highest satisfaction that her young friend should have fixed her predilections on a gentleman of whom she had heard such excellent report, and the Captain declaring himself overwhelmed by the patronage of a lady so universally respected. The two bows did not quite knock the two heads together; and then there was a great deal of feeling discussion upon the difficulties encountered by young people in forming those mutual understandings so essential to con-nubial felicity; and a great deal of commiseration for the peculiar and indescribable difficulties in establishing those mutualities for Captain Cox. And then Mrs. Toogood took another dip in that torrent "which always ran crooked," and which seemed, once upon a time, to have been her favourite

bathing place ; lamented that Lucy's happy destiny might remove her from experienced guidance in her matrimonial duties ; and was entranced to hear that no such hapless removal was contemplated, as the Captain was immediately about to purchase the estate of Broome Warren. What a renewal of the brightest days of Adam and Eve !

The interview continued to warm into so much approval and respectful gratitude that we should almost have grieved if Crowley had walked in to disturb it. There might have been a splash in the "torrent" more frightful than a combined plunge of all the dead dogs it contained. But the Captain was blessed with many assurances of encouragement from all Lucy's distinguished friends without such fatal immersion ; bowed his head submissively to the lessons for young gentlemen about to pay their addresses ; shook his ringlets with affectionate reproach to dear Lucy for having never confessed her predilections to so wise a lady ; and was ardently impatient at the deliberate composition of a passport to Goldsworthy. At last it was placed in his hand, with instructions to call again with the account of his delightful reception, many friendly regards to Lady Goldfield, and many special regrets that her nephew, who would have been so charmed to see him, was absent from home. Then he was to clothe himself in flannel now that the autumn was advancing, and the wind was sometimes in the north and sometimes in the east, and sometimes somewhere else ; and then he was to take care how he rode on

horseback, for the servant seemed to be holding a very spirited animal, and, if he were to fall off, what a shock it would be to poor Lucy ! Experience was not always security, and confidence often came to grief ! With this excellent text for a copy-book, he made his profoundest obeisance, and trotted off with another sly wink at Miss Betsy who was still convulsed at her window.

Considering what we have seen of Captain Cox's relations with Lord Goldfield, he may appear somewhat rash in counting so complacently on his presentation at Goldsworthy ; but he had passed his life in calculations, and been too successful to believe he could make a blunder. True, he had ruined Lord Goldfield, but the fact was not yet known to the public, and the last of the public to whom it would be admitted was the anxious mother, who was now to be the dupe of a deeper deception. Crowley, also, though his acquaintance with her son was, doubtless, much more intimate than he had suffered it to appear, must have been trusted with quite as little, from fear of his communications; and, as for Lucy, she knew nothing, and would be glad enough to say nothing, that could lead to the detection of their meeting in London. Of course, many things must have come out soon which would have made his present venture impossible ; but, if he only obtained a footing in the house, a great deal might be done in a short time, backed as he was by fortune and his claims on Broome Warren. The fallacy of these calculations is known, but it is necessary to

show how the Captain deceived himself to account for the step he was now taking.

His road led him within sight of Oakendell, and the cottage-chimney which Betsy had pointed out, and he half-checked his horse to debate whether he should make a dash for the stolen letters; but he soon thought better of it, as he had done the night before, for the peril of appearing in person was too great. It was, indeed, almost as serious a question how to lay hands on them now, as when they were packed in Lucy's box. The hurry of his short interview with Betsy had caused him to overlook this. The letters must not remain till they were missed, as all efforts would then be used to recover them. Betsy would be the first person suspected, and to save herself she would betray her tempter. At any risk they must be secured that night, and the means formed study enough for the rest of his trot. Whilst he pursues it, we will take another look into Oakendell House.

Crowley had determined to commence his journey to Lord Goldfield the moment his aunt left him; but the post arrived with his newspaper, and, in glancing over it, he came to the column headed "Sporting Intelligence." It chanced to be the great week at Doncaster. For two or three days there would be no hope of finding Lord Goldfield at home, and it was better to await the climax which was too sure to send him there.

The news was not long upon the road, for it came by express and Lord Goldfield himself. Will o' the

Wisp was extinguished, and the fortunes he carried were swallowed up !

If the reader is at all experienced in the hunting-field he may, in some degree, appreciate the young lord's sensations from a slightly analogous event in his own history. Does he remember that remarkable day when his young ambition tempted him to distinguish himself at that fence which sent his horse, tail foremost, into the next field ; the four or five revolutions which he himself made in the air before his back made a proof-impression in the mire ? Has he forgotten how his eyes rolled at the flaring Girandole ; how his hair stood a hundred ways at once ; how his breath was knocked out of his body, and his ears took to singing, like two Cœolian harps ? Does he not boil, even now, at the shouts from one-half of the field, and the mutterings of " Poor devil !" from the other ? Was he ever so desolate as when he lay in that furrow and saw all the " deuced good fellows" gallop away from him ; when he wondered whether it was an earthquake, and how he should ever find his way home, and what he should say when he got there ? If he recollects all this, and twenty times more, he may have a faint vision of Harry of Goldfield, when he realized his last " dead certainty."

Where was that " best fellow in the world"—where was Cox, who had gladdened his heart with that first horse in the race, counting from the far end—at a mere trifle of five thousand guineas ? What had become of him since the surprising end of Weasel and the handicap ? Had he ever received

that letter to hold his hand in the betting ? Why was he not here to reckon up the proceeds of three to one on Will o' the Wisp, and twenty to two against Podos Okeus ?—

“Pulverem Olympicum
Collegisse juvat !”

and he knew there was no more dust to be collected from the pockets of my Lord Harry. In consideration of which incredible fact, a smiling gentleman of the crowd politely handed him a letter, of which these were the contents :—

“MY DEAR GOLDFIELD,

“I have requested a friend not to trouble you with this till after the race, which, of course, you have won. Accept my hearty congratulations that you have now a clear world before you, and are in trim to wipe off old scores for all those supplies from Moses Pinhorn. If you will do this to-morrow or next day, it will save you a great deal of trouble, for that Moses is a terrible harpy, and swears he will not wait another moment.

“I hope to receive a good many thousands for you at the Corner, on Monday, upon investments of three to one on Will o' the Wisp—a yawner if we had lost—but that was out of the question.

“Believe me yours truly,

“SAMUEL COX.”

My Lord Harry rushed from the field, flung himself into the first railway carriage, and devoured his way for another consultation with Crowley.

He found his friend in equal affliction, though a very different one, and moodily revolving his miseries, to which Captain Cox was, at that moment, trotting hard to add another.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed the full heart to the empty purse. “What is the matter? Do you come from a mad-house?”

“Worse,” answered my lord. “A thousand times worse! Unriddle this cursed book, and learn the last news from the Paradise of Fools! Had I but taken your advice—but no—it was too late. I was over head-and-ears already; and what signified a few more fathoms? Let me ring for a glass of brandy; I cannot speak. I will not interrupt you. Read—read—and say what’s to become of me?”

“Be a man,” said Crowley, much too shocked to take credit for his late warning. “You frighten me. Your senses would be the worst loss of all; and perhaps you have not lost so much as you believe. I could name some who have lost more.”

“My mother! She has lost her misplaced pride in an only son. Were it not for that, I could bear anything.”

“Then do not think so ill of her. She knows

the worst already, and prides in you as much as ever. She would rather see you ruined than retrieved by the ruin of others. Your own she may in part remedy. She has spoken to me very much upon it. You know not what a mother you have."

"I would not have her sacrifice a hair of her head to restore all that is gone."

"She knows it; and there lies the pride you doubt. There may be other means that will less afflict you. I do not vouch for them. They are but glimmerings as yet. But since I saw you, I have learnt something more of Captain Cox, which would require a longer story than you can understand. I suspect he has the principal claim upon you?"

"He and the Jew, of whom I know nothing, from whom I have received no more accommodation than I could pay off in a single year of sanity. It is the compound cent. per cent. that defies arithmetic. I can think of nothing. I am worn out. My mother—my poor mother. I dare not go to Goldsworthy."

"I will send her a note to say that you are here, but too tired with your journey to proceed farther. It will not be long before you see her, and you need fear no reproach. Lie down upon that sofa till they bring you something better than brandy. You have taken nothing since you left Doncaster?"

“Nothing. Make haste and write to my mother.”

Crowley rang the bell and took up his pen; and in a few seconds the poor exhausted dupe was in a death-like sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

WE now move onward, and, passing Captain Cox, who has slackened his pace to touch up his toilet, make our way to the grand saloon, where, brightest of its brilliant ornaments, are the eyes he is about to dazzle.

It was the second day after the farewells to Oakendell, and the meantime had been so well occupied by Lady Goldfield in urging the arrangements she had planned on her last evening there, that her two favourites could interpose no obstacles to wishes which transferred them from their recent homes to prospects so unforeseen and joyous. The Vicar, too, could no more withstand persuasions so enforced, than he could have brought his conscience to stammer out *nolo episcopari*, his conjugal sacrifice finding ample consolation in the conviction that the constant misunderstandings between himself and Jim Crow would reconcile Mrs. Bloomer to a removal much farther.

To prevent all over-nice sense of obligation for

this change, Lady Goldfield had made another proposal that left no time for it. The physician, who still paid occasional visits to Mr. Bloomer, had expressed an opinion that nothing would so soon restore his health as a short time at the sea-side, and had recommended Sea Cliff—of which we have spoken some way back—as the best place within reasonable distance. Having often sent patients there, he knew the accommodation; and one lodging in particular that was most desirable from being kept by an excellent widow, well accustomed to nursing. This lodging Lady Goldfield had written to secure, and another near it, as one would not be enough for the party.

The morning of this second day was too fine and tempting to admit of delay. Such slight preparations as were necessary for a place so sequestered, were soon made, and Lucy was leaving the room to tell the Vicar that the carriage was ready, when a servant entered with a card and a letter, which he presented to the Countess.

The name of Cox was too familiar to her, and caused a momentary dread that nothing could bring him there but some evil tidings of her son; but in that respect the letter soon relieved her, though it very much amazed her in another.

“My dear Lucy,” she said, “have you ever had reason to believe Mrs. Toogood out of her mind?”

“On the contrary,” replied Lucy, surprised and

amused at the question. "I have always thought her gifted with too much sense!"

"Then, my dear, read that, and you will think her in great need of restraint."

The first sentence of the letter was abundant proof that whatever her state of mind, Mrs. Too-good's pen could produce great sensation. As soon as Lucy's would allow her breath, she read as follows:—

"MY DEAR LADY GOLDFIELD,

"You will be much surprised to hear that I only yesterday made the important discovery that our young friend Lucy is engaged to be married. I own I wish she had entrusted me with this secret, because such events require much serious advice; but we must not forget a very sensible saying of somebody's—unless I have invented it—that we cannot place old heads upon young shoulders.

"The moment I heard this news, I thought it my duty, as Lucy's oldest friend, to prevent the scandal of a clandestine engagement by writing to the gentleman, whose name is Captain Cox; and a remarkably nice young man he is. He tells me a most interesting and touching story of their attachment, which arose from his having heard of her misfortunes and forlorn situation, and a letter which he took the liberty of writing to place his own ample fortune and himself at her disposal. Lucy, no doubt, too much affected by such an instance of

devoted generosity to think of taking counsel where she might otherwise have remembered it was always in store for her, was unable to resist the occasion of her aunt's attendance at a poultry show, and went up to London, where the acquaintance commenced. Since then it has been carried on by his constant attentions in the country and meetings in the forest; the last communication between them being so late as the day before yesterday, at the house of my nephew.

"Now, my dear Lady Goldfield, as you cannot fail to perceive the immense consequence to Lucy, I am sure you will permit Captain Cox, whom you will find a perfect gentleman, to pay his addresses at Goldsworthy, according to established usage, and thus prevent the injurious talk of persons who are too apt to meddle with things in which they have no concern.

"Please to tell Lucy I am thinking of a great deal to say to her, and am only too happy to serve her in spite of herself."

The notes of admiration accorded to this sublime effort of wisdom would have been extremely gratifying to the benevolent writer, who, in common with many other extra good people, laboured for no reward but an erring world's ingratitude. It is a pity she was not there to hear how honestly she received her full allowance, with something to spare, and likewise how urgently her special charge, Lucy,

petitioned that Captain Cox should be favoured by the reception he coveted. Mary Lightfoot, tingling in every nerve, was equally importunate; and Lady Goldfield setting them a good example of imper-turbable high breed, and resuming a hasty note to invite Crowley to Sea Cliff on his return, they both employed themselves, as if no interruption had occurred. Polly at her fancy work, and Lucy at her favourite occupation of arranging the variegated vase of carnations. The bell had been touched, and the servant was desired to show in the person who had brought the letter, by which peculiar wording the intelligent domestic understood he was to hold himself in readiness to show him out.

Whatever might have been the Captain's society in the betting-ring, it was his first introduction to the presence of high quality of the other sex, and the serene indifference of the elegant group before the magnificent pier glass and behind the richly ornamented saloon table, somewhat abashed him. Considering the time they had taken to assure themselves of his high claims to estimation, he had looked for a more affable and smiling expression than appeared in the Countess whose head was the only one that honoured him with a haughty inclination. The young ladies (he supposed it was etiquette) merely raised their eyes, as if to see who it was that entered, and continued their employ-ment. He was probably the only gentleman who could have looked upon so much beauty without

admiration. But he had made a deep plunge, and had no resource but to strike out, which he did with much bowing and smiling, and that gasp of satisfaction usually produced by bursting button holes and central compression. He commenced with polished assurance to express his great sense of the honour accorded to him by her ladyship, who was busy writing, an urbane bend to Polly, who was threading her needle, and a step of more confidence towards Lucy, the action of whose *tout ensemble* informed him that he was quite near enough. Being a calculating gentleman, he had calculated that Lucy, who had all her life been confined to a village, would be as meek as heart could desire in the presence of an awful Countess. He would have laid long odds upon it, but it was not "a dead certainty." Her courage had received some education of late, and her lonely studies and quick apprehension had supplied her with language, for occasional use, rather beyond her years. Her high spirit came by inheritance, and, instead of confusion, she put down her carnations, and, regarding him with a calm look, was the first to speak.

"Captain Cox," she said, "it is right I should inform you that you owe your reception here to my particular request."

Captain Cox again bowed gallantly, and expressed his acknowledgments with another smile; but it looked a little more blank.

She then took up Mrs. Toogood's letter, which

had been thrown upon the table, and referred to it as she continued.

“Be good enough to tell me if you have seen or know the contents of this letter of which you have been the bearer.”

The Captain had not enjoyed an hour’s conversation with Mrs. Toogood without making some estimate of her sense, prudence, and extensive power of doing the most mischief where she intended the most good, and replied that their admirable friend had not shown him her letter or told him what it contained.

“Be good enough to read it, and oblige me with your observations,” and she handed it to his side of the table.

He read it over with dilated eyes, and a series of exclamations, each more emphatic than the last, which certainly proved him to have had no hand in the composition. Their amiable friend, he protested, must have had a most fertile invention, or a much too amiable reliance on the inventions of others, for there was scarce a word of truth from end to end.

“I must beg you will be more distinct on some points, and especially tax your memory to state how often we have met.”

The Captain was in difficulties. His ally, Miss Betsy, had been somewhat rash about his claims to patronage, and he was obliged to admit that he had never had the honour of seeing Miss Longland but once in his life.

"You will now, Captain Cox; be good enough to say how many letters you have received from me."

"Miss Longland, I should be too happy to say I had ever received one."

"My last request in regard to Mrs. Toogood is that you will favour me with the date of that engagement with which she commences."

"Alas, need I say that it has never yet had any date?"

"That I believe will suffice till I resume this discussion with Mrs. Toogood herself, and warn her how far she may trust her confidential maid-servant, from whom she receives the intelligence on which she founds her proceedings, and sometimes her introductions. We shall see how far Captain Cox is indebted for his presentation to the Countess of Goldfield, to the kind offices of Miss Betsy, the lady's-maid."

Captain Cox had not reckoned upon this ready guess, which Lucy was justified in believing to be a certainty from her daily observations in Mrs. Toogood's house. What reply he would have made to this near approach of detection we will not attempt to imagine, for he had soon something else to think of.

"We will now," continued Lucy, in the same calmly imperative tone, "endeavour to account for that one occasion on which you did see me, for which purpose I must trouble you to recall a time

long past. A relation of yours claimed, I believe, to be a distant one of my father's."

"It is a great pride, Miss Longland, to be connected with you in however remote a degree."

"The degree, Captain Cox, is too remote for my powers of vision, and I request you will not suppose that I presume to claim it. My object is to show the grounds upon which the person I allude to besought my father's assistance in his troubles, and, taking advantage of his generosity and inexperience in business, robbed him of all he possessed."

"Forgive me, Miss Longland, forgive me if I take the liberty of reminding you that you were too young at the period of our relation's troubles to have any knowledge of them, and that what you have received since may not perhaps be strictly relied on."

"My knowledge comes from my father's letters, which Captain Cox will excuse me preferring to his corrections."

Those letters again ! They jumped up like spectres ! How heartily the Captain wished them safe back in their places. He could only bow and beseech her to remember they were speaking of a relation.

"I remember nothing so flattering, and that I am speaking to Captain Cox, who, as heir-at-law to the relation in whom he appears to pride himself, inherited the ample proceeds of dishonesty and betrayed confidence."

“Really—really—I must again—now really—I am sure you cannot be aware of the full force of these expressions, or you would not have done me the honour of coming to London.”

“My coming to London, as you well know, was occasioned by a letter which you enclosed to me, and which you represented as recently received from my father. The date was altered to favour the deceit, and should have indicated a time before he left this country.”

The smile of the Captain became blander and blander. No doubt the fixed eyes of Lady Goldfield and Polly, who had both discontinued their employment, were rather trying to his equanimity.

“Miss Longland, I am not in the habit of betraying secrets which young ladies usually consider to be of a very delicate nature, but you oblige me to remind you that our interview embraced another subject.”

“I am not likely to forget it, for it brought that interview to a speedy close, and compelled me to call a servant to open the door for you, a ceremony which will probably be repeated presently. Your pretext for presenting yourself was to give me tidings of my father. Your object was to obtain these tidings; your hope was to gain his sanction to presumptuous attentions, and secure yourself from some uncertainty in the turn of future events.”

The Captain looked bewildered for an answer,

and could only make a submissive remonstrance against such strange misconstructions, and the hardship of being supposed capable of contradicting such determined prepossession, more particularly when the last words were beyond his comprehension.

His comprehension, however, was unexpectedly enlivened by Mary Lightfoot, panting to suppress the pretty fury which whirled her to Lucy's aid.

" You do not understand them ?" she said. " Then perhaps, Captain Cox, you will suffer me to explain them ; and, for the shorter means, inform us for what purpose you called on Mr. Cheek during Mr. Bloomer's illness ?"

There he was again bewildered. How did the sharp young lady know he had done so ? But, of course, it was from great anxiety for Miss Longland.

" Miss Longland must be very grateful. And, of course, it was the same anxiety that prompted the bribe in the forest, that moonshiny night, for all family papers, and not at all to make Miss Longland your security against better claims of her own ?"

She was again beyond his comprehension.

" For what purpose then, to be more explicit, was the purchase of Mr. Cheek's connivance and treachery, and his influence over Miss Longland, as her father's trusted agent ?"

Incomprehensible ! .

"Indeed ! I will make it clearer. You bought him, and his treachery, and his influence. You have since found the venture unprofitable, and forget that confederates in evil are apt to be quarrelsome. You forget your mutual threats at Mr. Badger's office in London. Why are they not fulfilled after these many weeks ? Why have you not proclaimed each other, as you promised ? Why, but because you are both afraid ?"

Inexplicable !

"And why, instead of providing yourself with a complimentary introduction from your friends, Lord Goldfield and Mr. Crowley, have you imposed upon a senseless old lady to send you here, except for a last chance of forestalling exposure ?"

Polly was out of breath, and the Captain's changing countenance showed farther dismay as Lady Goldfield laid down her pen and rose.

"It is time," she said, "to close this unprofitable interview, though I must not let it pass, Captain Cox, without acquainting you that it has brought nothing to light with which I was not perfectly familiar. The whole subject has been some time in hands more competent to deal with it. Miss Longland is my peculiar care, and her home is henceforth here, where you must perceive there is no want of protection. If I may advise, you will cease to think of her, and begin to think a little more of yourself. It is reported that you aspire to the purchase of her father's mansion by the proceeds of your dealings with my son, but allow me

to caution you against so rash an undertaking. It is doubtful how far your hands may reach, and how soon you may be called upon to refund certain other resources. Your compact with the person named Cheek is not more promising than your retaining fee of a reckless young man's 'last hundred' to Mr. Crowley. You may possibly have taken advantage of his intended absence from the country to make this intrusion, but he is not gone, and may presently be here, which may lead to unpleasant enquiries respecting your business at his house, two days ago. I hope it may not be your misfortune to meet him. We have nothing to add but our regrets to Mrs. Toogood that we must, in future, decline her introductions."

With which she made a stately step to the bell.

Cox had tried several times to interrupt this deliberate speech, but a slight wave of the hand had kept him in subjection. Seeing, however, that he was about to be turned out of the house, he thought it high time for another remonstrance.

"Lady Goldfield," he exclaimed, "I am a gentleman, and should be shocked to trespass on your courtesy; but, before I make my painful adieu, I would warn Miss Longland against overmuch reliance on her excellent instructor, Mr. Cheek, to whom I perceive my obligations. As that gentleman has shown remarkable acquaintance with the late Mr. Downton's history, he will very shortly be required to afford some information respecting its

close, in which, I fear, he may have to account for sundry convivial hints of disclosures and compulsory powers not entirely satisfactory to a spirit so admirable."

Mary Lightfoot was again bursting forth, but the bell had been pulled, and the folding doors opened, with a tall footman standing on each side.

It is not easy to look charming with our hair standing on end, or to dispense compliments where "the reciprocity is all on one side," but as the Captain saw no need of distressing his respectful escort with too precise a knowledge of the duty for which it was summoned, he did both to admiration. Nothing could have been more graceful than his semi-circular bow, if he had not knocked his head against the door-post; and his last words conveyed a delightful sense of her ladyship's flattering reception, with the most polite assurance that the affairs of Lord Goldfield should have his immediate attention.

Though the meaning of this civility was not lost, Lady Goldfield felt it less than the shame that such should have been the chosen companion of her son; but she had not much time to lament his humiliation before one of the servants re-entered with the hasty note from Crowley, and then came other cause for emotion.

"Henry is at Oakendell!" she exclaimed. "Too tired to come on, which means that he is ill! I cannot go with you this morning, my dears; I must follow you. Take everything; carriage and ser-

vants, just as you find them, and make yourselves as happy as you can. Good-bye—God bless you. I shall soon be with you."

And she gave both of them a tremulous kiss, and hastened out of the room.

She was scarcely gone when they heard the sound of wheels. Crowley's servant, that no time might be lost, had taken the carriage which conveyed the young ruin of the race course from the station, and Lady Goldfield had impatiently taken it back to Oakendell. Lucy and Polly were at a loss what to do.

"Mary," said Lucy, "we cannot go."

"We must," replied Polly, "we shall be in the way."

"My uncle! True—we shall only be a trouble—we must be gone. I have caused commotion enough! But you must stay. We cannot all go at such a time, and one may be useful. Lord Goldfield must be ill indeed to come so near home without reaching it. Pray stay; we know not what comfort you may be; and besides, how else can I have tidings?"

The hesitation ended in Polly's compliance; for she was equally reluctant to stay or go; and then came another alteration of arrangements.

"I cannot," said Lucy, "take away the carriage and servants. Lady Goldfield may be detained longer than she expects, and will have need of them herself. I shall send them home from the station, where we are sure to find other conveyances, when we leave it for Sea Cliff; and, for servants, we have

written for my uncle's man and a maid-servant to be there before us. Beg her pardon, dear Mary, and tell her it is my love that disobeys. Here is my uncle. Bless you, dearest, bless you! But stay! I remember I flung a letter into my fireplace, just before our last dinner at Oakendell. As the fire was not lighted, it may be there now, and there is no more need to make a mystery of it. Beg Mr. Crowley to have it looked for, and learn how far I was to blame for it. You have just heard my reply to it. Come, uncle, I am quite ready."

And the two friends took a more unwilling farewell than is usual for the short separation of a day or two. Neither could have told why, but both seemed conscious of something akin to the instinct that warns the bird to shelter.

CHAPTER VII.

A S soon as Cox repassed the lodge-gates, and found himself in the forest, he slackened his pace to a walk, and left his more composed animal to choose the way. He had no choice of his own, for mischief, mortification, and rage, were everywhere, and, however he might gnash his teeth, he could see nothing to rend. The worst of these mental hurly-burries is, that they grow more intolerable in proportion to their impotence; and the further our Captain went, the more he was resolved to do something unheard of, if he could only think what it should be. Chance, or something worse, soon came to his assistance. He was surprised by the sound of a carriage, and a trot of half-a-minute brought him within sight of a public road. What should he see advancing along this, but the equipage of Lady Goldfield, the occupants of which he presently distinguished to be no other than Lucy and an old gentleman, who, of course, was her uncle.

That they were not merely taking a ride was evident from the appearance of luggage. It was a

journey ; and, more than that, it was not a journey to Broome Warren, but just in the opposite direction ; perhaps to some place more accessible than a mansion protected by a regiment of grenadiers. Fortune had never deserted him ! She often keeps bad company ; and he now took her for his guide, in a line with the road, till it terminated in a small, isolated railway station. Here Lucy and Mr. Bloomer alighted, and the horses were turned to retrace their steps.

“ Waiting for a train !” thought Captain Cox, and he waited too. Presently it came, and, with a stoppage of a minute or two, resumed its course. Not, however, without an intermediate incident ; for, as soon as the new travellers had taken their places, he jumped from his horse to inquire of the station-master for what place his friends had taken their tickets. By this official he was informed that, being pressed for time, he had requested them to pay at the end of their journey. The Captain then seized upon the guard, and, placing a sovereign in his hand, quickly pencilled on a card his address at Broome Warren.

“ Let me know,” he said, “ by the first means you can, where the old gentleman and the young lady are set down.”

“ All right, sir,” replied the guard. The engine screamed, and the Captain remounted.

He did not think it advisable, for various reasons, to arrive at the “ Longland Arms ” till towards the close of day, and proceeded at a walk ; lost in cogi-

tations which supplied nothing attractive to his always sinister expression. Sometimes they seemed irresolute; but, after a while, they became settled to some purpose visibly desperate. Had there been a doubt, his own fierce and unconscious exclamation would have ended it.

"Be the risk what it may," he broke out, "by — I will hazard it!" And to this he added a mark of admiration, by a stripe upon his horse's shoulder. The horse, not understanding this emphatic close of the argument, plunged forward; but the rider had a good seat, and was only reminded to look about for his bearings. He perceived his reverie must have carried him out of his way, and that, in fact, he had lost himself. The scene was gloomy, and would have been solemn to a spectator of more poetic temperament. The large, rugged stems of the trees were too crowded together for the usual undergrowth of such unfrequented places, and had drawn each other up to a vast height, interlacing their branches in a manner not unsuggestive of an ancient cathedral. A few red rays of the declining sun flung partial patches of fire, and the rough bark tingled with the appearance of highly-finished architecture. The illusion might have been carried out by the shadows which crossed each other on the dead sod, like tessellated pavement, and the horse picked his way as if afraid to trust his footing. Even Cox, earthy as he was, appeared to be not very pleasantly impressed by the dead silence and the absence of all pathway. Had he felt any desire

for an article so unfashionable, here was just the place to find a conscience.

He was carefully examining the ground for footprints, when this solemn silence was broken by a crash and a fall, which not only shook the earth, but sent him capering three feet from its surface.

“ What the —— is that ? ” he ejaculated, with a check of the bridle, and a scared look out for the forest in full charge upon him. But he heard nothing more till, after a short interval, he was relieved by the less-alarming sound of a hatchet, which apprized him that he had only started at the felling of a tree, and must presently come upon a party of woodcutters. He accordingly stepped out more comfortably to enquire in what part of King William’s dominions he might chance to be, and in which of the four quarters he was to look for Broome Warren.

In little more than a hundred yards, he came upon a small clearing, where everything was black and burnt, except a few stacks of bark, and the forest patriarch who had just taken his measure upon the ground and was undergoing the process of dissection, preparatory to the conversion of his limbs into charcoal. Scattered about were other dismembered trunks, with their snaky honours piled about them ; intermixed with which were smouldering fires, and a colony of smutty rags. At the fire nearest to him, and seated upon the spiky butt of a giant beech that once gave shelter to the wood-pigeon, and had since, perhaps, seen its branches

shot away at him in gunpowder, sat a sad looking young woman ; tattered indeed, but not so much so as might have been looked for in such a scene, and much too clean to be in keeping with it. She had a bit of red cloak over her head and shoulders ; and, but that her hair was not black enough, and her complexion was more sunburnt than tawny, would have looked like a wandering gipsy. Between her and the horseman stood a sturdy little boy, with a head like a hedge-hog, displaying the spoils of a bird-catcher's day's sport—a jay and a magpie, probably intended to be cooked in the smoke for their evening meal.

“Look, Nelly,” he was saying, “we shan’t starve to-night ! But this ain’t the place for my traps—there’s no berries here, and we’d best be off, for that friend of yours that was to come back in three days ain’t coming no more.”

“It is true, Tommy, he has been away more than five weeks. I’m afraid our daddy can’t be found or that some accident has happened. But we must stay whilst there’s a chance, though the nights are getting cold—and—”

She stopped suddenly at the sight of the stranger, whose approach had not been heard for the crackle of the fire on which she had cast a fresh bundle of sticks.

“My girl,” he said, as she drew the cloak closer round her face, “can you tell me the nearest way to Broome Warren ?”

Nelly had started at the face before he spoke, and

the voice assured her that this was no other than the cool and impudent visitor of her late detested master, from whom she was so desirous of hiding herself.

“Tell the gentleman,” she said to Tommy, and turned again to the fire; though, in present circumstances, he was not likely to recognize more in her face than its remarkable intelligence and well-formed features. But his habits suggested further conversation.

“I had rather trust to you than to this little fellow,” he persisted. “Turn round and let us look at you.”

Nelly’s blood would have mounted in any case at such insolent freedom, but here were more than usual motives. She was aware of the design upon Lucy with which he had come down from London, and remembered the wrongs of Aaron, who had so pitied her and so readily gone away in her service. She forgot her fear, which proved needless, and turned upon him with a look more steady than he wished for.

“And what,” she enquired, with no show of rustic confusion, “do you want more than the road you have lost? It lies in that direction.” And she raised her arm proudly to point to it.

“By Jove, you are a high and mighty lass; but a deuced pretty one!” With which he tossed her half-a-crown.

“Tommy,” she said, with calm contempt, “give it me.”

Tommy did so, and she cast it away.

“ Heyday, you are a strange one! Are you not a gipsy?”

“ What if I am?”

“ Why, then, you can tell me my fortune. There is my hand.”

“ I can tell it better by your face.” And she met his eyes with an unabashed attention which almost quelled his confidence. She had seen much of the fortune-telling tribe about the forest, and assumed their mystic character, though not with their lively cajolery, for she thought rather to gratify a fair feeling of resentment.

“ Come,” he said, “ you have studied my face long enough. Tell me what you see in it?”

“ I see,” she replied, recollecting the cruel history of the Longlands, “ in the far past, a happy home made empty by a thankless thief, in return for too much trust and too much favour. That home is silent now as the graves of those who sheltered him; but he has long since found another; which, by all accounts, must be noisy enough. Let him rob that of his howling self; it would be worth his while!”

“ And what means that?” said the Captain, looking quite sharp enough to have found a meaning for himself.

“ We are only gifted to speak of what we see. It is for those who hear us to explain. Another thief came after him, as bad as the first; and is now

thinking how he may steal away the last flower that grows upon the ruin."

The Captain looked sharper.

"But the flower is beyond his reach, and there are good spirits behind him. From these he is himself in the greater danger."

"Aye ! Can you describe these spirits more plainly ?"

"I only see the bad one. Heaven gave him a form of this world, but he chose his lot in a worse, and has the mark of it in his face that the hang-man may know his own. He lives amongst things of his own kind, whose pleasure it is to rob their betters till there is nothing left; and then they rob one another. It was so that I heard a bull bellowing by this forest. One that he thought to drive, but which has now turned upon him, and is hard at his heels."

Nelly was beginning to be more perspicuous ; but the Captain joined in her derisive laugh, though his tone was not very hearty.

"Hark !" she continued. "I hear a voice at this moment, far, far away ! It says, 'I was once doomed to serve this evil spirit. He chained me amongst thieves, because I was not bad enough for him ; but we shall meet again. Let him look over his shoulder ; I am close behind him !'"

"Girl !" exclaimed Cox. "Where got you all this rubbish ?"

"From the winds. They have passed by. I hear no more."

"What are you ? A witch or a cheat ? I'll give

you gold instead of silver if you speak plainly. You have mentioned no names."

"Our business is only with things. Others find names. I am neither witch nor cheat, nor out and out mad, though I've seen things hereabouts that might make folks doubt their senses. Your own may not be safe, so go your way. There—yonder—straight as I point."

"Will you be my guide?"

"No."

"Will you let me see you again?"

"No."

Wherewith she took the hand of her staring little brother, and walked away to the people at work. Cox could gain nothing by following, and turned as she directed.

He had plenty to think of before he met her, and now he had plenty more. His nerves had been pretty well prepared to receive Nelly's finishing touches, and his day's work, in painter's phrase, was wonderfully brought forward by the mist she had thrown into the distance. That is to say, his plans, whatever they were, became all the more pressing for immediate attention. We can hardly suppose such a constitution impressible by a touch of superstition; but how, if not by a gift of divination, could a wild girl have set before him the whole course of his life? It was unaccountable; his previous excitement was very much increased, and so when he arrived at the Longland Arms he ordered, in advance of his dinner, a bottle of the

landlord's best wine, which was enough to kill his horse, to calm his pulse and clear his understanding. What the bottle contained he was too busy to inquire; and, if he had, his stock of knowledge would not have been very much improved, for the landlord knew as little as himself. It was enough for him that the Captain drank it without complaining, and blinked through the casement and scarlet-runners at the setting sun; in deep study about something else.

He studied till the red orb had sunk behind the cottages opposite, and the waiting girl at the house door was threatening the ostler, for conduct very irregular, in public, and many little ceremonies of rustic courtship announced the close of graver toils, and the old people were going in and the cats were coming out, when the Captain jumped from his chair and exclaimed,

“The devil! Could that girl have been a real witch, or do I see ten thousand miles?”

He rubbed his eyes, and stared, and rubbed them again. There was no delusion. He stared upon the vision of a long-forgotten form and features, battered by years and hardships, but still unmistakable. It was the man he had transported so long ago—the veritable Aaron Daunt!

“I believe Captain Cox is here?” said Aaron to the barmaid.

“Yes,” she replied. “What's your business?”

“I have a message for him.”

She opened the room door, and Aaron strode in

with a glare that might have burst out of a jungle.

"Good evening, Captain Cox; I hope I see you well!"

Captain Cox's head had taken so many turns that day, and now took such another twirl that, what with his bottle and his conscience, he could hardly have said whether he was well or ill. The only thing he could speak to was his very boundless amazement. "We shall meet again," the phantom had said to the girl of the woods, and here he was!

The greeting was a series of strange fragments; ill-concealed apprehensions on the part of Cox, and steady derisive smiles on the features of Aaron. Seeing, after a while, that his former dependent, by whom he had dealt so hardly, showed no disposition to break the peace, Cox partially recovered his presence of mind, and endeavoured to seem very much gratified.

"Yes, Aaron, I am indeed surprised, and immensely glad to see you! I have always wondered what had become of you. But I have some recollection. I have so many things to think of that I seldom recollect anything beyond the last week. I have a faint recollection of some cursed mistakes of some sort or other, and that the lawyers, or somebody of that kind, got hold of them. But whatever the matter was, I forget all about it, and don't want to remember. Tell me what singular fortune has brought you to this part of the world."

"Well, sir," replied Aaron, "such fortunes as mine are singular enough to take a man anywhere. What I met with in a distant land, where I was mingled with many in the same plight, was hard enough to bear, but I bore it because none had a right to look down upon me. But here, in my own free country, I move about on fire, and if I meet my dearest friend, I must hide till he passes by. No matter if, when my time was up, and I made my way through a thousand miles of wilderness, bare-foot and broken down, to work a passage home—no matter if I then learnt how my innocence had been proved years before, and that I had been sought and supposed dead—"

"Was that the case?" exclaimed Cox, in virtuous indignation against all concerned, except himself.

"Aye, sir, that was the case. It is not to be expected that a gentleman, who has not leisure to recollect the past week, should think anything of a convicted felon. No matter, I say, if this was proved, for who was to care, one way or the other, whether a man, ten years forgotten, was guilty or innocent? The fact remained that I had been transported, and guilt or innocence could not alter that; they make no difference in worldly view. Then what was left for me but to herd with miserables, or go wild again amongst the beasts of the forest? I preferred the last, and that, sir, is the singular fortune which brought me here."

Aaron paused, quivering with the vengeance

which he only seemed to restrain for a better chance of making it sure. But the Captain had too much upon his mind to be a close observer.

"Why, Aaron," he said, "can this be you, with your back broken by a feather weight? What signifies it now that all is over? What have you to do but follow the example of thousands, and change your name, and then who is to be the wiser?"

"In the first place, sir, I should be so myself, and, in the second, it would be a cheat, both weak enough reasons for gentlemen with strong minds, but both too strong for mine."

"Absurd! I could tell you scores of far worse cases in the best society, and amongst my own best friends. I'll find you a better situation than you ever had, and give you a better character than your master!"

"Perhaps you might, sir; but transportation is a bad trait, and so it is to have no friend in the world, and not a hope of one, unless I secure him by a lie, which would rather deserve a halter. I never tried, and never wished to thrive upon anything but truth and honesty; and so, if you please, we'll put all other means out of the question."

Cox was sensible of the rebuke, but ashamed to appear so, and joined in its sentiment, as we may sometimes have remarked in the weak and worthless who have stepped beyond prudent soundings, and find it best to scramble back. But Aaron had special reasons for not discouraging a renewal of

former relations, and returned with a look of some peculiar design to the Captain's question of what brought him to that part of the country.

"Perhaps, sir," he said, "you may think it a wild sort of despair which drives me to hide myself in those dark forests, to work with the woodman and the charcoal-burner, and frighten the lonely wayfarer with a black visage and a midnight furnace. A return to the fellings and clearings which have crashed over so many years of my life might not have been sufficiently tempting, had there been no other inducement. You have heard, I dare say, of a certain Mr. Christopher Cheek, who lives in this village?"

The mention of that name produced, as expected, no pleasant effect upon Captain Cox, and called forth no measured amount of fierce and fearful exclamations.

"And as those, sir, are entirely my own opinions, he struck me as being the only person I know who may not object to the services of a convict, more especially as your worthy uncle, my former master, was his great friend, and had many negotiations with him, which I understood to be no trifles."

"Have nothing to do with him, Aaron! A few years' trouble, under a mistake, would be a high recommendation in comparison to any connection with that rogue. I have a great regard for you, Aaron, and cannot by any means allow you to think of it. It is only a few weeks since he robbed me of five thousand pounds, and had the

face to swear he would rob me of a great deal more."

"Indeed, sir," replied Aaron. "You are very good, sir, to take so much concern in me! If you think your good character, with the one small blemish, would help me to a better service, perhaps you might assist my application to a gentleman who has lately come to live in this neighbourhood, and has not yet, as I understand, collected his full establishment. Perhaps Mr. Crowley may be known to you?"

The new proposal was not more palatable. Cox was equally averse to both of Aaron's speculations, alleging that he knew nothing at all about Mr. Crowley, and did not like what he had heard. He was in great perplexity, though stronger, every moment, in assurances that he would do everything that could be desired, whilst Aaron, with something of that independent irony, on which we have before remarked, prepared his next alternative.

"Well, sir, there is another plan of helping me, if you would be so good, to which I think there can be no objection, either on the score of character or acquaintance. The pleasure of seeing you made me quite forget that I bring you a message. I have just come off a short journey, and received your card from the guard of a railway train."

Cox started.

"I heard him enquiring for a hand to Broome Warren, and told him I was coming here, upon which he gave me this scrap of paper, to say that

the old gentleman and the young lady had been set down at the Sea Cliff station, where, on the return passage, I had got up."

"Do you know who they were?"

"Why, yes, sir, to avoid all mistakes I made the enquiry. The guard had helped the luggage into a fly for Sea Cliff, and observed that one box had the name of the Rev. Mr. Bloomer, and the other of Miss Longland."

He gave this news with the riveting eye of a staunch pointer, sure of his game.

"Now, sir, as they have gone without servants, I was thinking you might be kind enough to speak a good word for me, and I will set out without losing an instant."

Cox was driven to extremities. The last proposal suited him the least, for it was the shortest and most direct road to defeat. It was imperative to secure Aaron to himself, and the stormy state of his head made him reckless to the hazard. It was bad policy, no doubt, to put himself at the mercy of a man to whom he had shown none; but a ruinous certainty was worse, and so he decided.

"Aaron, all these projects are nonsense. You and I ought never to have parted, and we never must. I have heavy amends to make you for that judge and jury, and you may take your oath I will."

"You need not trouble yourself about that, sir.

I desire nothing better than to return to my place. If any former feeling of distrust remains, perhaps I may remove it by telling you that I know as much of your present intentions as you do yourself. What hinders, if I were so disposed, that I should carry my information to Miss Longland, or to Mr. Crowley, here, hard by ? How would you speed then ?"

" Do I not say that I have the fullest confidence, and is it not for that reason that I want you back ? My only fear is in your d——d conscientiousness."

" I think, sir, you mistake me. My conscience relates only to myself, and has nothing to do with my master's. He looks to that himself, and what he bids me do is not for me to question. What business would it be of mine, for instance, if your present object were to follow Miss Longland and end a few troubles at a few hazards, before it is too late ?"

At any rate, it was too late to deny it. The Captain had still sense enough to see that he was overmatched, and had no alternative but to re-engage the last man on earth he would have chosen. Aaron's keen eyes, by whatever miracle, had cut him open, and it needed little time to establish them in perfect understanding.

" Yes, Aaron, there's no denying it ; we must be at Sea Cliff before it is too late. What sort of a place is it ?"

"Just the sort you want, sir. Two or three small lodging-houses, half-a-mile from a scattered fishing-village, chiefly inhabited by smugglers and wreckers, and wild as such places usually are. Neither law nor sobriety that I could see, and not much security."

"How came they to go there?"

"For the sea air, I should think, sir. When you came down to learn if Mr. Bloomer was dead, you, of course, knew he was ill."

"How did you hear it?"

"Oh, sir, it is a long story. I'll tell you as we travel."

"When can you be ready?"

"I am ready now, sir. I have nothing to detain me—anywhere."

"Whom do you know at Sea Cliff?"

"Only the worst of the lot—the Commodore, as they call him, of all that cheat the revenue and carry contraband to just such another place in France. I knew him better than I wished: I had to pay him a visit just when he ran in with a valuable cargo and the Customs were looking out for him. We had a sharp run for it, and were blocked out of port for more than a month!"

"What sort of a vessel has he?"

"A good sailer, sir. The revenue-cutter has never been able to catch her."

"Then, Aaron, we will start to-night, as soon as you have done a small commission for me, which I

am too well-known hereabouts to do for myself." He then gave his messenger, so surprisingly well-provided by chance when he despaired of finding any other, minute directions to the cottage to which Betsy had consigned the dangerous packet, and Aaron immediately set out.

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD GOLDFIELD had been in too dire need, both of comfort and repose, for Lady Goldfield to convey him to Goldsworthy till about the time of Aaron's mission from the "Longland Arms." They then left Crowley suffering under far different spasmodic affections than those he had so long experienced. The vindication of Lucy from all injurious doubts had been complete, and the one grief, still unexplained, only remained upon his mind as a reproach to himself. As he had previously been almost insane in one direction, he was now quite as much so in another; for he was overwhelmed with conviction that Mrs. Toogood's version of "the course of true love never did run smooth," was not a bit more true than his own paraphrase, which maintained that the eyes of true love never did see straight. He was one of the very worst of the many millions who had dragged perfection through all the unhallowed gradations of suspicion, and had not courage to indulge a thought of pardon. But, as he had deceived himself before, he might be doing so again,

and so he would gallop off to Sea Cliff the first thing in the morning.

In the meantime, he would put his horse in wind by a gallop to his aunt, to thank her for the greatest good she had ever perpetrated, and take Tom Philpot in his way to rejoice over the grand discomfiture of Captain Cox.

By-the-bye ! What had become of honest Tom ? He had promised to report the news of his night's watch, and now the second day had passed without bringing him ! Shame to say, there had been no leisure to think of him before, and Crowley now ordered his horse for inquiries at Huntsmore Lodge.

The distance was not more than three miles by the road, but he was impatient, and took a shorter course across the rugged country. He had not gone half the way when a bank of brambles, with a probably deep ditch on the other side, obliged him to make a sharp use of the spur. It was lucky he did so, for he might otherwise have found an unceremonious introduction to a comfortable party of three individuals, who were crouching under his girths.

“Stop, sir ! Stop ! stop ! Mr. Crowley !” They cried all at once, in low and hurried voices, as if fearful of being heard farther than necessary.

He pulled up in surprise, and beheld three heads staring out of the earth, one of which was Tom Philpot's. The others belonged to his two gamekeepers.

"Why, what's the matter?" he demanded.
"What are you doing there?"

"Listen, sir! Only listen a moment, and you'll hear it again."

"Don't stir, Mr. Crowley! Don't speak above your breath. Jump off, or they'll see you."

"Who do you mean, Tom?" asked Crowley, as he dismounted. "I wonder I did not kill you all. What are you watching for?"

"Hush! Only listen! Let us hide your horse in the ditch here, and you'll know what's the matter soon enough."

The horse, as temperate as bold, slid down the bank and stood as still as in his stall. Tom held up his finger to enjoin silence.

"There, sir! There!" whispered the keepers.

"There!" added Tom. "Did you hear that?"

"I heard nothing," said Crowley, "but the faint crow of a cock."

"That's it, sir! that's it!" whispered one knowing fellow. "I hope he has got life enough in him to crow a little longer, and call his gang."

"That's it," whispered the other. "You had better keep your head down, sir, the blackguards will fight shy. Keep down, sir, and I'll cut you a good blackthorn."

"Why what is there so alarming in the crowing of a cock?" demanded the still bewildered Crowley.

"More than you imagine," replied Tom. "That's not a common crow; that's the crow of a game

fellow that has just killed his man, and is close at the last gasp himself. We found him last night, tethered to a peg and trimmed of his tail, and armed with a pair of steel spurs, half a foot long. It is the way they poach in this country. The cock pheasants take offence at his crow, and come down to fight; and then, as they have only got their natural spurs, he whips the steel into them like a fencing master; and there they lie, kicking in their blood, till some scoundrel comes to wring their necks."

Crowley was more shocked at the cruelty than the poaching, and put himself under Tom's command without further question. The repeated order was to lie still and listen. There was no breeze to stir a leaf of the old oaks that, grouped and singly, rose out of the tall, tawny fern, till, at two or three hundred yards, they were massed into a thick wood; and nothing was heard but the feeble triumph of the cock.

"It is hardly time for them yet," whispered Tom. "They will wait till the workpeople are gone home. When the smoke rises from the woodman's chimney which you see away there towards the sunset, it will be half-past six, and then we shall know more about it. In the meantime, as here is your black-thorn, we had better go to our stations. The cock is tethered in a small, clear space, just a hundred and fifty yards from us. I'll go a hundred beyond him, and, with you and these fellows, we can lie down at four corners. Be ready to close up when

they come for the birds, but don't be in a hurry. Come upon your hands and knees, and when I jump up everybody do the same."

Tom was in his natural element, and Crowley was amused to see how brilliantly it brought him out. He only seemed to want one quality for a commander-in-chief, and that was a due regard for his commissariat, for he looked starved.

"All the better," said Tom, "for a run after these villains, if they slip through our fingers. I had a good breakfast yesterday, and can wait very well till to-morrow."

With which he stole off to the probable line of retreat. Crowley and the two men took their places at the points indicated; and nothing was wanted but the enemy.

For some time no enemies appeared but the multitude of winged insects, which were quite enough to keep attention alive, had there been nothing else. The old white owl went on with his mousing as if he saw nothing to alarm him, and the pheasants on the tree tops returned the challenge of their still defiant adversary, as if they heard nothing to silence them. The sun had long sunk out of sight, and the purple outline of the wild scene was cutting hard upon the reflected gold in the sky. It was getting almost too dark to see anything else; but just at this moment Crowley became sensible of a sudden hush amongst the branches, and the crowing ceased. There must be somebody not far off, he thought; and he took off

his hat and raised his head above the fern. By degrees he distinguished some object moving between him and the keeper on his left. Presently it stopped.

It was the upper half of a man, looking about him. Again it advanced, and again halted, and finally stopped short to look down upon the champion at the stake. Nobody moved, for he had not yet laid hands upon his game ; nor did he show any haste to do so, but rather to have been arrested by curiosity, or pity at what he could not immediately understand. As soon as he had satisfied himself, he stooped down to untie the gallant cock, and was in the act of releasing him from his weapons, when his four lookers-on advanced near enough to hear some involuntary words.

“ Poor fellow ! ” said a deep voice, “ you have fought like a soldier ; but I hope you are too game to die ! Go along and get well ! ”

The bird staggered a little way, and fell upon his side.

“ Poor fellow ! ” continued the deep voice. “ You are terribly knocked about, and very stiff. Let me put you on your legs.”

Whilst he was stooping the party closed in, and he started up with a bound. Before him stood Crowley ; on each side was a keeper ; and behind him Tom Philpot. Notwithstanding the odds, he showed more surprise than alarm, and stood at bay with a display of dimensions more qualified to inspire it. No one could have doubted the resolu-

tion who looked upon the unshrinking lineaments of Aaron Daunt ; for Aaron it was, though, of course, unknown. He had missed the direct line back to Broome Warren, and had been looking about to recover it when accident brought him to the hero he had just befriended.

“ Four of you, are there ? ” he said ; “ I did not think there were four such scoundrels in the country ; but, if you were twice as many, that poor thing should not die till he saw you lie beside him ! ”

Here Tom and the keepers set up a wrathful laugh at the impudence of a vagabond who could hope to turn the tables on his detectors, and were preparing to rush upon him.

“ Stop ! ” cried Crowley, who thought there was too much evidence of sincerity for so sudden a subterfuge. “ Do any of you know this man ? ”

“ Know him ? ” replied Tom, “ I never saw him, but I have not the smallest doubt that he is the man we have waited for, two whole days and nights.”

The keepers knew as little, but were quite as certain ; and Crowley was again obliged to interfere. His manner of speaking and his dress, which the sudden turmoil had prevented Aaron from remarking, assured him that he was in the presence of a gentleman.

“ We are all mistaken, sir,” he said respectfully, dropping his arms to explain how he came there. “ I am a traveller, and have never been through this

part of the forest before. I have lost my way and am looking for it."

"That won't do!" cried all three at once, "for the path he has come by leads to nowhere but a hut which is known as a house of call for all the poachers and thieves for miles round!"

"I'll swear," continued Tom, "he is the fellow I have hunted night after night!"

Aaron's fierce spirit could hardly control itself, but his need to get on was fiercer still, and he could ill afford to raise impediments.

"Look, sir," he replied, again addressing himself to Crowley, "at this gentleman and me, and judge how far I should have troubled him to hunt me! It is hard for a man to bear this for only losing his way and doing a small act of humanity which you would have done yourself."

"But how, sir," interrupted one of the keepers, "could he have got so far from the road and come so straight from that den of thieves to this tethered cock if he had not known where to find him?"

"Not likely, sir," exclaimed the other; "and how did he happen to come just when we said he would, and when they always come? There's a terrible gang of 'em hereabouts, and I shouldn't wonder if some of 'em were pretty handy just now."

"Sure as you stand there," contributed Tom; "and it was only the night before last that we saw one of their girls coming from your own house, with a lame story about Mrs. Toogood's maid!"

The allusion to Miss Betsy brought Cox to mind,
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and the long account which Crowley owed to that gentleman he was honestly bent upon paying. Here was a vague surmise of something more tangible as to plots in his house than Miss Betsy had thought fit to reveal. Perception runs quick when touched in a sore place. Betsy had business with a girl connected with these rogues, from whom the man before him was thought to have come; therefore it was not unlikely that he might be an emissary from Cox. The game cock was forgotten. Here was better game on foot.

"Hark you, my friend," said Crowley, with a decided change of manner. "You may find it best to answer truly. Where do you come from?"

"I have no home."

"Something more explicit, if you please. It is seldom that men so well spoken are without a home. I ask you where you come from."

"From a long distance. I suppose it has nothing to do with my being here."

"It may have something to do with where you go next."

And so thought Aaron. His past history would certainly not have improved the prospects of his future one, and he was silent. Here was more suspicion.

"What is your name?"

Aaron felt that a convict, fresh from transportation, could derive little benefit from his name; though in reality it would have served him very effectually.

"I might easily give you a false one," he replied, "and you would find nobody here to dispute it. My true one needs no improvement from tongues like these."

The keepers jeered, and Tom was unappeasable. "He will not say who he is or where he comes from, and is caught in the fact! What more is wanted?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said one of the men. "But it is not safe to stay here."

"No, sir," said the other. "We had best take him to Broome Warren before we have our throats cut."

"Quite right," added Tom; "give yourself no further trouble. We'll have him before another magistrate."

Aaron stopped short at the last moment of endurance. That other magistrate, he thought, must be Cheek, for he was the only one at Broome Warren, and with Cheek his liberty was sure enough. It would not detain him long, and he declared his readiness to go.

"Another word first," persisted Crowley in his growing certainty. "When did you last see Captain Cox?"

Aaron was not prepared for so sudden a question, and showed it. He answered indirectly. "Allow me my turn of inquiry, sir, of who you may be and what is your authority to ask?"

"You refuse to answer? Search him!"

"Aye! search me, and welcome to all you find.

It is long since I found anything for myself." And he helped the keepers with a bitter smile to turn his pockets inside out, and showed them all to be empty. "There, gentlemen, share it amongst you."

"Thank you!" said Tom. "For my share I'll have this card." For Aaron had never thought of Cox's card which he had received at the railway, and was as much surprised as the rest to see it fall from him.

"Here!" shouted the exulting Tom, as soon as the sinking light enabled him to make it out. "What do you think of this?"

"And what is this?" said one of the keepers, picking up a paper parcel which Aaron had laid upon the ground to untie the poor object of his pity. Crowley tore it open, and found several letters addressed to Lucy.

At the same moment they were joined by a party of late workmen, who, returning to their homes by the neighbouring road, with their axes over their shoulders, had been attracted by the sound of loud voices. Aaron saw that resistance was now too late, and that Crowley's examination of the card and the parcel had made him as merciless as the rest.

"Now I give you just one chance to get clear off. Confederate of Cox, as you are, and the thief of Miss Longland's letters. Where is Captain Cox to be found?"

"I am neither thief nor confederate, and can

satisfy all questions from those who have a right to make them, but you have not told me yours."

"You impudent rascal!" exclaimed the exasperated Tom. "This is Mr. Crowley."

"Mr. Crowley!" repeated Aaron, hesitating whether he should commit the fate of Cox to other hands, when ten years of wrong so fiercely claimed it from his own. "Mr. Crowley?" But the feeling of vengeance had become a part of his nature, and he would rather have given up his life than the hope which had so long sustained it. "Mr. Crowley," he said again, "I know you have much cause against Captain Cox; but you must wait till I have done with him. I strongly counsel you to let me go, or you will curse the consequences."

This speech, in allusion to Lucy's imminent danger, was unluckily misunderstood as a menace of Cox's resentment, and Crowley's moderation was not much restored by it. Intimidation from Captain Cox!

"Run, one of you," he said, "to yonder ditch, and bring me a stirrup leather. We must make this gentleman sure. Come here, Tom; here's something else upon this card, written in pencil and half rubbed out. See if your eyes can read it."

"They are all smokers here," replied Tom; "will somebody lend us a lucifer?"

The man nearest immediately struck a light.

A glimpse was sufficient. The address which Cox had written was plainly deciphered, and Crowley called to the man who was gone for the stirrup leather to bring horse and all.

“ Strap this fellow’s arms behind him, and take care he does not escape. Captain Cox I can deal with myself.”

What was to be the nature of the dealing was not expressed ; though, from the haste with which he mounted, nothing very pleasant could be guessed. Giving a hasty order that the gallant Jim Crow and his trophies—for, to our great concern, the wounded hero proved to be no other than our old acquaintance—should be taken to Mrs. Bloomer, he set off at a rapid pace, paying no attention to a last warning from Aaron.

Tom and his prize, and all the rest of the rough group followed the same road ; but as they travelled on foot, and we are curious to see what happens at the Longland Arms, we leave them behind.

It was more than two hours since Aaron had gone on his mission, and Cox had become seriously uneasy lest his newly-recovered confidant had already turned traitor, and only gone away to bring him to grief. He began to think it was not safe to remain in his inn, and that it might be as well to pay his bill, and order his horse, either with or without his guide. Having settled the first matter, he stepped into the stable yard and settled the second by riding out of it. He then walked his

horse backwards and forwards on the dark green opposite, just near enough to hear any foot that approached, and just far enough to be out of sight. He patrolled in this manner long enough to be certain that something was going wrong, when he heard the gallop of a horse. In a few seconds it was pulled up at the inn door, and the landlord and the ostler and two or three women ran with a light to see who came in such a hurry. The flash displayed the rider too clearly to be doubted.

"You have a gentleman here by the name of Cox ?" said Crowley.

"We had, sir, a while ago," replied the landlord, "but he's gone."

"Gone ! Where ?"

"Railly, sir, I can't say. Do you know, John Ostler ?"

"No, sir, I don't. It was so dark that I didn't see which way he turned."

"How long has he been gone ?"

"Oh, sir, ever so long."

Crowley could not restrain a malediction.

"When do you expect him back ?"

"Deed, sir, I can't say. He don't come often."

"Hark you, landlord ; you know me ?"

"Oh, yes, your honour : Squire Crowley."

"Then when he comes again, say nothing of his having been enquired for, but let me know instantly, and I'll share fifty pounds amongst you."

"God bless your honour ; you shan't be long a-hearing."

And Crowley turned his horse homeward, muttering his mortification, and Captain Cox withdrew his custom from the Longland Arms. The landlord and his household stood some time staring at the darkness, and Cox stood staring at them.

“That’s a rare gentleman,” observed the former. “He spends more money than all the parish, and don’t begrudge it. I wonder what’s the matter. That ’tother un spends his money too, but he ain’t a gentleman, for all that, and if any of you breathes a word to him, woe betide you.”

It was some time before the door was finally closed; for, every now and then, somebody looked out for a share of the fifty pounds, and the Captain had more use for his eyes than courage for his heels. He had made a narrow escape, but had no conjecture where he could be safe. That Aaron had sent Crowley, and had given up the stolen letters, was certain, and the consequences were pretty nearly so. Certain was it also, that he must have been villain enough to betray all the schemes for Sea Cliff; and then again was it certain that he was “foundered in all four legs, and should run nowhere—unless he ran in a halter.” A bad conscience is a capital architect, and out of very small materials very often builds a pyramid.

He continued to enjoy his reflections, and to wonder what he should do, till he distinguished “coming events casting their shadows before,” with a heavy tramp and a huge lantern behind them. They were composed of Aaron in the centre, and

four or five grim conductors on each side. What could this mean? Aaron with his elbows strapped behind him, looking less like an informer than a bold, defiant, first-class desperado. Never was astonishment so astonishing! He had been taken with the letters, no doubt of that; but he had proved a rare, good, honest, faithful fellow, and not said a word to save himself. There was no danger in leaving such an excellent, trustworthy servant to his fate, whatever it might be, and he had only to dissolve partnership again, and carry out his adventures single-handed. But it was prudent to hear and see a little more, to be quite sure.

We have mentioned Aaron's calculations upon Justice Cheek, which made him so accommodating; but Justice Cheek was by no means the justice to suit Tom Philpot. The case of Dame Rokins, and the appointment of Crowley to the commission, had occasioned some consideration for the peace establishment of Broome Warren, and a request had been made to the neighbouring squires to favour it with a weekly petty sessions. The first of these Tom knew to be fixed for the next day; and so, when his party entered the village, he had stepped into a cottage and held a short parley with the constable. Dogberry took a large key from a nail in his wall, and, lantern in hand, led the way straight towards Justice Cheek's, without any resistance from the prisoner, till he got to the green, and then, for prudential reasons, he followed it. There was, in fact, in the same direction, a small

tenement to which it might be advisable not to direct Aaron's attention till he heard the key rattle in its rusty wards. It was too late to retrieve his mistake, for in the same instant that he saw the intention, he was shouldered into the round-house, and the only answer he received to his burst of rage was a double turn of the lock.

Faithful to the last! thought Cox, in his happy ignorance of what made him so. Never was such a servant seen! And so, for the second time, he left him to shift for himself, and slunk away to his crowning exploit at Sea Cliff.

CHAPTER IX.

EARLY the next morning Mr. Cheek was awakened, as most of us have been, by that inveterate propensity of industrious domestics to make any noise that may be unnecessary, just when we are enjoying our most comfortable nap, that is to say, just when it is time to get up. Having roared for mercy to Mrs. Nancy Tuck, and exhausted all the moods and tenses of a verb generally used in the imperative, without making the slightest impression, he amused himself with thinking of the great loss he had sustained in Nelly, and felt that nothing could console him for it till he heard of her death and burial. From Nelly he turned to Aaron, and from Aaron to Dover. For what were they gone to Dover ? The question produced a peculiar crinkle upon his face, as it had done whenever old Nanny had found occasion to allude to them ; and one would have fancied that Dover and Nelly, and Aaron, occupied him a great deal.

At last he was too restless to remain in bed, and

appeared to think that something must be done without loss of time, though he could not decide upon what ;—a state of mind in which many people imagine they make important progress by putting themselves in a bustle. Having performed his toilet with cold water because Nanny could not hear him shouting for hot, and embellished himself in a manner suitable to a dignitary of the Petty Sessions, at which, of course, he was to act as chairman and preside over all the other potentates, he clattered down to breakfast. Here he was again reminded of Nelly, for he found no preparation but a dirty pat of butter pinched into shape by Nanny's thumb and finger, a hacked loaf with a strong odour of onions, an uncleaned knife, and a greasy plate. No smoking coffee, no fizzing bacon, no anything where he used to find it, and nothing within arm's length of anything else. He was altogether put out, and stamped into the kitchen to storm and stop the noise, when he found there was again no fire.

“Hullo!” he cried, in the old woman's ear.
“Where's the fire?”

“Eh? What say?”

“Where's the fire?”

“Gone out.”

“So I see; and whose fault is that?”

“The fault o' the 'ood, that sputtered it out, whilst
I was gone to the shop for the coffee.”

“And where is it?”

“Ey?”

“ Where is it, I say ?”

“ They ain’t got none.”

“ Confound you ! And what have you been making all this noise about ?”

“ Pounding some peas, which is better ; but they ain’t roasted enough, ’cause you see the fire went out. You’ll have breakfast afore long, and whilst it’s a-making, I’ll tell you summut.”

“ What is it ; what have you to tell ?”

“ Why, I seed that gentleman as is a friend of yourn.”

“ What gentleman ?”

“ Him as took Nelly away.”

“ You did ! Where ?”

“ Ey ?”

“ Where did you see him ?”

“ In the cage.”

Mr. Cheek forgot his creature comforts, and seemed more in want of mental ones.

“ Aaron in the cage ?”

“ Ey, ey ;” and she kept pounding on.

“ Stop that noise, you infernal hag ! What’s he there for ?”

“ Ey ? How should I know ?”

“ Did you see Nelly ?”

“ No—not I.”

“ Did you ask him where she was ?”

“ Aye, did I ?”

“ Well ? Get on ! Where was she ?”

“ The gentleman wouldn’t say.”

Some sudden thought startled Mr. Cheek very

much, but we must have been greatly mistaken in our first guess at its nature, for it looked like a shock of satisfaction. It could not possibly have occurred to him that, a short time before, a monstrous sinner had lured a young woman from her place, and murdered her to escape consequences; and that, if he had done such a thing at Broome Warren, he would have been in the cage, just like Aaron, preparatory to another event over the County Gaol! It would have been wild, indeed, to suppose his Worship could have entertained such a thought as that in connection with his friend Aaron. So eager was his anxiety to know what had happened, that he put off breakfast till dinner-time; and, pushing old Nanny flat upon her parched peas, left her rolling upon castors to rush out for information.

Alack! The favourable doubts we have thrown out in the last paragraph are, we grieve to say, more consistent with probability than truth. It has been evident, all through our history, that Aaron possessed some very malign influence over Cheek, but we have only just arrived at that portion of our materials which enables us to assign a cause for the comparative tranquillity with which he bore it. The truth is that, being well aware of the reckless resolution of Aaron, he had made sure that he left Broome Warren, some two months ago, with the fixed purpose of fulfilling his threat against Cox in a manner which would subject him to capital consequences, and put him out of the way. The time

passed in daily expectation of this exploit had become more and more intolerable, and most of all since the undefined hints of Cox, at Mr. Badger's, though he knew them to have been only founded on suspicion. But here was Aaron again in Broome Warren, and about to be brought before a bench of magistrates ! Query, had he conferred one benefit by wreaking his vengeance, and was he going to confer another by suffering for it ? Or was he only taken up for some minor offence which might make him more dangerous than ever ? In the former case, Mr. Cheek had better not recall himself to Aaron's memory ; in the latter, he must be a stout protector to ensure his goodwill. No wonder he was in haste to know the truth, which met him before he emerged from his own dark lane. The sergeant of the Broome Warren police was on his way to tell him of the last night's capture, and explain, in all its details, the correct cause of it. Here was no capital crime after all, and no chance of anything worse than imprisonment ! Awfully disappointing, and no resource but the stout protection !

“Are any of the magistrates come ?” enquired Mr. Cheek.

“No, sir ; I don't expect them for this half-hour.”

“Then I shall go and open the Court, and take this case first.” And away stepped Mr. Cheek to discharge his friend before any one came to dissent ; in order to let him loose upon Cox with a fresh pro-

vocation, and a great obligation to himself for another chance of the gallows.

From this point we may save ourselves some trouble by quoting the County Chronicle, published the next day; *videlicet*—

“Our readers will be glad to hear that the long-desired Petty Sessions at Broome Warren came off yesterday; Mr. Nib, the eminent solicitor of our County Town, having been appointed Clerk of the Peace, with instructions to furnish himself with warrants, summonses, and commitments sufficient for the arrears of many years.

“Long before the opening of the Court, the entire population were assembled before the Longland Arms, and the Round House opposite, to instruct themselves in what a Petty Sessions meant. A great many being apprehensive that it was a general hanging day, or a series of processions at the cart’s tail, in which most of them were more or less concerned. Something like a preliminary caper commenced on the first magisterial arrival, in the person of the Worshipful Justice Cheek, who entered the Court with great appearance of excitement, and enquired of Mr. Nib what the ——we did not quite catch the word—Broome Warren wanted with a Petty Session or the rural police. He, the worthy magistrate, had transacted the business of the parish with the parish constable, time out of mind; and the only object of these innovations was to increase the rates, and make the nation bankrupt. Since, how-

ever, it was so arranged, he should take the chair and proceed to business.

“Mr. Nib consulted his watch, and submitted that it still wanted a few minutes of the time fixed, and that it was usual, on such occasions, for the Chairman to be appointed by his brother magistrates ; to which his Worship replied that they might all go to——we again missed the word. The crowd who had followed in, and were looking over each other’s shoulders with great interest, appeared to agree very heartily in the last remark, and the police had some difficulty in keeping order, which occupied the few remaining minutes.

“The next to arrive were our distinguished County Member, Sir Hector Stonycross, and the Reverend Dr. Gravesend, both regarded with such wholesome dread for their eloquent advocacy of Reformatories and Sunday Schools. They enquired, with much obliging condescension, after the health of Mr. Nib, who reported himself pretty well, and very much gratified to perceive their Worships were the same. Having their attention directed to one end of the table, they necessarily turned their backs to the other, which was, no doubt, the cause of their not perceiving Mr. Cheek.

“The Bench was soon augmented by the gallant Captain Drinkwater, of the Broome Warren Yeomanry, well known for his opposition to beer-shops and skittles ; and presently after by the highly respected Justice Bulfinch, who has saved the nation such a mint of money in the article of out-

of-door relief. They were followed by Squires Doubleditch and Popshot, and lastly, by Squire Crowley, whose distinguished biography and pedigree we published in our last number. Altogether, the assemblage presented a formidable aspect to the natives, so long accustomed to self-government in all its branches, and so well-known to be strict Conservatives in that line of politics, when Sir Hector Stonycross took the chair, *pro tempore*, to propose its future occupant.

“We must not presume to follow the rhetorical abundance, amidst which our great contemporary of Printing House Square has so often stood lost in amazement, and the six hundred first gentlemen of the land declared themselves to be carried up by a whirlwind and down again in a waterspout, but content ourselves by reporting that the Honourable Baronet’s speech commanded breathless attention for one hour and twenty minutes, and ended in proposing James Crowley, Esq., for the high elevation of the Broome Warren Chair.

“The proposal being ably seconded by the Reverend Dr. Gravesend, who we are sorry to say only enlightened us for fifty minutes, Justice Crowley was unanimously voted to the end of the table, with the exception of one dissentient in Mr. Cheek. That gentleman, in a striking vein of elocution, objecting on every possible ground that could be urged, and claiming his right, on just as many grounds which were undeniable, to nominate himself. The question being put, his Worship received one vote which,

being his own, was decided to be none at all ; and, under his most energetic protest, and with great acclamation from the rest of the Bench, Mr. Crowley took the chair. His Worship returned thanks in a brief speech of much elegance and some latent humour; regretting that his knowledge of magisterial law extended no further than a fine once levied upon him for riding over a field of turnips. He trusted, however, that his more experienced brethren of the Bench would not, in their efforts to keep the public in order, be unmindful of the much greater necessities of their chairman ; in which sentiment Mr. Cheek signified his accordance by an applauding, ‘ Hear, hear.’

“ At the same moment a police constable approached the chairman with a letter on Her Majesty’s Service, just arrived by the post. The chairman immediately stood up and read it as follows, premising that it was dated yesterday :

“ ‘ SIR,

“ ‘ I am directed by his lordship, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, to inform you that frequent letters have been addressed from this office to Mr. Christopher Cheek, some time a magistrate in your district, to require an account of certain measures taken by him in reference to a widow of humble class, whose name is Rokins, and that the said Mr. Cheek has declined to make any reply thereto, in consequence of which you are requested to inform that person, at the Petty Sessions to be

held to-morrow, that his name is erased from the commission.

‘I have the honour to be, &c., &c.’

“The crowd burst out in a roar of jubilation, and Mr. Cheek, who is a gentleman not easily abashed, burst out in a roar of defiance, the counter roar being directed at the Bench, the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister, and even Majesty itself, none of them being independent of the law, which Mr. Cheek expounded as ‘once a Justice, always a Justice.’ Finding there was no probability of stopping this effusion of eloquence, the chairman, in the most obliging manner, invited his ex-worship to vacate the room, which, not being agreeable to that gentleman’s views, was understood by the police as an order to eject him, and, after a terrible gust or two, the tempest rolled away.

“The chairman then requested Sir Hector to take his place, *pro tem.* the first case being a robbery in his own house. The honourable baronet obligingly consented, and a burly individual was brought up from the Round House, charged with receiving stolen letters, knowing them to have been stolen. Being asked his name and occupation, he replied that, having committed no offence, their worships need not trouble themselves to ask him any questions.

“The account of his detection by Messrs. Crowley and Philpot, and two gamekeepers, with their clear evidence, is over long for our columns, which can

only admit a few concluding particulars after the production of a young woman from some remote hut in the forest. She was a fine, frantic-eyed, tangle-haired termagant, wild as a wolf, and quite as ready to fly at somebody ; but after staring round at their worships, and coming to Justice Crowley, she looked more placable.

“‘ Ay !’ she muttered to the constable beside her, ‘ that’s something like !’

“‘ Hold your tongue, you hussy !’ admonished Sir Hector, in his usual elevated tone. ‘ What do you mean by something like ?’

“‘ Not you,’ she replied, ‘ I mean him,’ pointing to Mr. Crowley.

“‘ Mind your business, or you’ll go to prison.’

“‘ I won’t. Mind yours, and I’ll mind mine. What am I brought here for ?’

“‘ What’s your name ?’

“‘ Sal.’

“‘ What next ?’

“‘ Nothing. I’ve five or six other names, but I dunno which is the right one.’

“‘ What’s your employment ?’

“‘ I make brooms and faggots, and do odd jobs.’

“‘ What do you know about these letters ?’

“‘ What *should* I know ? I can’t read.’

“‘ How did you get them, I say ?’

“‘ How do you know I got ‘em ? Lord a massy, what a justice *you* are ! But come, I’ll tell you,

whilst you are bothering your head how to find out. I got them from the great house.'

"‘ And *how* did you get them ?'

"‘ From a friend.'

"‘ What friend ?'

"‘ I’ve more friends than one there.'

"‘ Tell me who they are ?'

"‘ Why, Mrs. Toogood is one of ‘em, and the best of the bunch, for she gives me a crown a week.'

"‘ Gives *you* a crown a week ? And for what does she give it ?'

"‘ To make me a good gal.’ Upon which Miss Sally commented with a loud ha, ha !

"‘ Well, then, *try* and be good. Who gave you these letters ?'

"‘ Bet.'

"‘ And who is Bet ?'

"‘ Mrs. Toogood’s gal.'

"‘ And why did she give them to you ?'

"‘ To keep till somebody came for ‘em.'

"‘ And did anybody come ?'

"‘ Yes ; this big chap came.'

"‘ And did he get them ?'

"‘ To be sure ! Didn’t they take ‘em away from him ?'

"‘ Very good. Now, prisoner, ask her what you please.'

" The prisoner had nothing to ask, and, after a little private conversation between Sir Hector and the police sergeant, Miss Betsy Sweet was introduced, under a summons from Justice Crowley.

She was a great contrast to her friend, Sally, with sundry names; being rather pretty and delicate, though dressed, perhaps, with a little too much regard to effect. There was, besides, a more than necessary display of maiden timidity, verging upon slyness, from which Sally was quite free.

“ You are Mrs. Toogood’s gentlewoman, I believe ? ”
inquired Sir Hector.

“ The young lady signified the affirmative.

“ Do you know what you are brought here for ? ”

“ She signified the negative.

“ You have been lately on a visit, with your mistress, at Oakendell House ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Had you any acquaintance out of the house ? ”

“ Oh, no, sir.”

“ Then you never met a gentleman on horseback in the forest ? ”

“ Oh, certainly n—n—no ! —— ”

“ The word was almost out when her eye perceived Justice Crowley’s fixed upon her. It fortunately recalled her memory.

“ Oh, yes, sir, I did meet a gentleman one day when I was out gathering some flowers for my missis, sir ; and he asked his way, and said he was in a hurry, and begged me to put a letter in the post.”

“ In the post ? And how many miles was it to the nearest post ? ”

“ I’m sure, sir, I don’t know.”

“And we thought the young gentlewoman was somewhat lost and alarmed for her bearings.

“To whom was that letter addressed ?

“I’m sure, sir, I don’t——yes, sir, to Miss Longland, sir.”

“And where was Miss Longland ?

“Matters were getting worse. That eye of Mr. Crowley !

“I believe she was upstairs, sir.”

“Is there a post at Oakendell House from downstairs to upstairs ?

“Not that I know of, sir. I saw some letters on a table, and I threw it amongst them, as I told Mr. Crowley.”

“Very unsophisticated ! Do you know anything of other letters ?

“The interesting witness appeared to be getting further out of her way, and almost in despair of where it might lead her.

“Other letters ? No, sir. I saw no other letters.”

“You didn’t hand a whole packet to anyone else on that night ?

“Oh, no, sir ! certainly not !”

“Where is that girl that was here just now ? demanded Sir Hector of the constables.

“Sally of sundry names was recalled, and said, ‘How de doo, Bet ? What’s up with *you* ?’

“The witness was many more miles out of her way, and uttered something like a little shriek, as

if she had met a monster ; but, dark as the prospect was, her active wit darted about like a bat-mouse.

“‘A packet, sir ? I misunderstood. I thought you meant a packet of letters ; I remember a small parcel, but I knew nothing of what was in it. The gentleman—I recollect all about it now—he said the letter he gave me was to remind Miss Longland that she had a little parcel to send him, and wished me to give it to Sarah to keep for him ; that was it, sir.’

“‘Oh, that’s it ! Did Miss Longland give you the parcel ?

“‘Pray, sir, don’t hurry me, sir ! I never was in such a place as this before, and it rather confuses me ! No, sir ; I think she didn’t give it to me. She forgot it, I believe, and went down to dinner ; and so, seeing it lying amongst some things I had to pack for her, and knowing it by the gentleman’s description, I thought she would wish me to do as he requested ; and so I gave it to Sarah.’

“‘Perhaps, Sir Hector,’ said Justice Crowley, taking a letter from his pocket, ‘you would like to see the letter to Miss Longland ? I found it this morning, in consequence of a message I received from her.’

“‘What’s here ?’ continued Sir Hector, looking it over. ‘I see nothing about parcels. I see nothing but expressions of despair at Miss Longland’s bad opinion, and hopes of an opportunity of proving that he is not so bad as he seems—signed Samuel

Cox. I suppose you didn't know his name was Cox ?

"Oh, dear, no, sir ! How could I ?

"Take care, young woman ! You didn't know his name ; and yet it was only yesterday that you contrived to make your mistress give him a letter of introduction to Lady Goldfield."

"Oh, sir ! No, sir ! You are quite mistaken—you are, indeed ! Nobody can make my missis do anything !"

"Well, we shall see. Sergeant, did you take our compliments to Mrs. Toogood, and say we should be much obliged by seeing her here ?

"I did, Sir Hector," answered the sergeant ; "and I hear her carriage at the door just now."

"Poor little Abigail !

The highly respected Mrs. Toogood was shown in with her usual grace and affability, and the Bench rose up to receive her, Sir Hector bowing her to a chair beside him.

"We are sorry to give you so much trouble, Mrs. Toogood ; but everybody knows your extreme readiness to afford assistance wherever required."

Mrs. Toogood was always happy to do good, whether required or not. All their worships bore witness to it ; and Sir Hector begged she would be good enough to inform them whether she did not the day before, present a gentleman, named Cox, with a letter to Lady Goldfield ?

"Goodness !" exclaimed the lady. "Captain Cox was riding a very spirited horse, and I cautioned

him most particularly ! I hope the poor young gentleman has met with no accident ?

“ ‘ Not yet, ma’am ; but I fear a very serious one is impending.’

“ Mrs. Toogood was greatly alarmed.

“ ‘ Mr. Nib,’ continued his Worship, ‘ will you have the goodness to read over the evidence ?’

“ Mr. Nib read it, with all necessary comments and explanations, from the taking of the prisoner to Miss Betsy’s denial of all knowledge of the Captain ; at which Mrs. Toogood clasped her hands and raised her eyes and expressed every sensation, from terror to petrifaction.

“ ‘ Betsy !’ she cried. ‘ You do not know Captain Cox ! You did not assure me of Miss Longland’s great attachment to him ! You did not induce me to write to him—to introduce him at Goldsworthy —to lose my character for ever for judgment, sagacity, and foresight, by presenting a most infamous cheat, swindler, and robber, to the Countess of Goldfield !’

“ ‘ Oh, mem ! Don’t, mem ! I shall drop down dead, mem !’

“ There was great commotion. All their Worships who admired an interesting countenance were sorry, and all the village lasses who envied it, screamed with laughter. Sir Hector was obliged to vociferate all the penalties for contempt of court, but without effect, till the great varieties of feeling settled down in a natural death ; and then the honourable Baronet was permitted to thunder out

the law, and sign a warrant for the immediate apprehension of Captain Cox, and the committal of Miss Betsy to Lympton Gaol as an accomplice.

“It had really begun to be a pitiable case, when Justice Crowley rose to intercede, and represent that Miss Betsy, though she had acted very indiscreetly, had not quite come under the reproach of dishonesty, inasmuch as she had not appropriated anything to herself, and had only been guilty of a too-ready compliance with the fascinations of Captain Cox—a feeling of admiration of which she was now probably cured by the servants of Lady Goldfield, who had kicked him out of the house. He thought the justice of the case would be fully answered by committing her to a reformatory, instead of a prison, and knew of no establishment of that nature so admirable as the Rosary, where she would receive more excellent advice than could be found in any other place under the sun. The warrant for Captain Cox was another thing, and he himself with, he thought he might promise, the aid of Mr. Philpot and a few other experienced fox-hunters, would immediately address themselves to its execution, assisted by the whole staff of police. For fear of further mischance, he would keep the stolen letters in his own possession till he could restore them in person. He felt the delay; but his first care was due to the work in hand.

“The proposal being gallantly seconded by Captain Drinkwater, who devoted his sword to its aid, and by Mrs. Toogood, who guaranteed her unremitting

lectures, Sir Hector relented ; and Miss Betsy Sweet was accordingly committed to hard labour in the school of advice, and carried off screaming and wringing her hands in the custody of her mistress. But not before she had been bound over in heaviest penalties to appear on the trial of Captain Cox, whenever he could be caught, and many striking reflections by Mrs. Toogood on the fallibility of human judgment, which nobody could deny, and nobody did.

“Attention was now turned to the prisoner, who had all this time maintained a stern silence.

“‘Now, prisoner,’ resumed Sir Hector, ‘what is your defence ?’

“The man replied, with daring indifference, that he supposed it was of no use to make any.

“‘Where is your master ?

“‘I would not tell you, if I knew, sir, because I have something to say to him first. But if I were at liberty, and the thing were possible, I would leave one-half of my carcase in pawn till I brought you the whole of his.’

“‘Is this all you have to say ?

“‘Every word, sir, at present. Perhaps a jury may acquit me, and then you shall hear more. In the meantime, I have the satisfaction of feeling that, after what is past, my master will take care to keep himself out of farther mischief till I meet with him.’

“‘Mr. Nib, make out the commitment of a man,

who refuses to give his name, for trial at the next assizes. Take him away !

“ Their Worships then turned to a vast number of cases of intoxication, affiliation, and other moral delinquencies, and the Court broke up.”

Thus far the County Chronicle ; but we must not conclude our chapter without answering a question or two from our critical reader ; the first of which is wherefore Aaron, who had so confidently relied upon Cheek the night before, should not have called for his protection before the quorum. For this we account by the fact that, whilst he was being escorted up-stairs, the furious descent of the ex-J.P. had nearly knocked him, escort and all, to the bottom. It would have been imprudent to depend upon a falling star, and distasteful to contract useless obligations to one which he was bent on sending to an abyss still lower. That he did not do so on an occasion so tempting, we must attribute to some uncertainty of his power until farther reference to Lucy, to see whom his great wish had not yet been accomplished.

We may next be asked what became of Mr. Cheek when he left his vacancy in the higher spheres ; which question we should not have suffered to be necessary, had we not been otherwise occupied at the time of his transit. He continued his evolutions then under ground, as actively as he had thought of performing them above, and flared a few strides to the lower sphere of the star of Foz-

zard, who had just been apprised of his disaster by Dr. Choke's breathless shop boy—that intelligent youth having been sent to watch proceedings in consequence of the dire rumours about Cox. The meeting of the friends was therefore directed straight to business, with no preliminary discourse but God bless me on one side, and an adjuration in exact opposition on the other.

"Here's pretty work, Fozzy! A warrant will be out against Cox in the midst of his application to Chancery. Of course they will give no order, and the sale of Broome Warren is as far off as ever."

Mr. Fozzard being well convinced by this time that his nuptials entirely depended on it, was in as great a hurry as his tyrant, and swelled his rotundity with a grand gasp of satisfaction to announce that Cox had sent for him, late the night before, to communicate the happy news that the order was already issued, the agents for carrying it out appointed just as he wished, and that nothing remained but to hasten the day for the auction.

Mr. Cheek went off in a few more adjurations to confirm his opinion that Fortune was not so bad a —— after all; and again a few more that if his dear friend Fozzy did not go to work, heart and soul, to forestall all chance of a revocation of the order when Cox's misadventure became public, he would most assuredly never bless the arms of Pen-nylopy. That was fixed as fate!

We leave them to complete their preparations, which will be explained soon enough by their

movements, and have nothing more to report, except that Mr. Cheek spent the rest of the day in curses upon Aaron if he did not break out of the crazy old prison as soon as he got there, and finish the history of Cox and himself before the next morning.

CHAPTER X.

WE now go back to Lucy and the Vicar after their journey by rail, and some portion of it in a rough country fly.

As they approached the descent to Sea Cliff through its toppling steeps of chalk and lime stone, with every fissure traced by the dark tamarisk, the fresh odour of the sea promised well to fulfil the doctor's predictions, and Lucy herself began to think less of the trial she had gone through in the morning. The view, where it was not shut out, presented much beauty and novelty. The sea, more intensely blue from its contrast with the glittering white foreground, was trembling with a scarcely perceptible breeze, which seemed to cover it with a net-work of golden threads. But where the obstructed tide leaped about the outstanding pinnacles, the shadows were of burnished bronze, veined with milky foam, like a quarry of *verde antique*. To the right and left were strata of crimson sand, and there it heaved like a bed of

subdued fire, only waiting for a wind to kindle it into flame. Clouds of sea gulls, and long black lines of cormorants coming home to roost, were nearly everything of life to be seen, and the little hamlet under-foot had shut up all but its chimney-tops, though the prismatic mingling of night and day made the hour the most inviting of the four-and-twenty. It was the very place of repose that Lucy desired, and when the vehicle reached the level line of huts upon the beach, there was not a picturesque porch amongst them in which she could not have made a happy home. A little beyond them, and their confused frontage of upturned keels, and nets, and lobster pots, the driver turned aside and dodged his way a few paces up the cliffs to a small but pretty white cottage that rose out of a bed of tamarisk, and was half hidden by honeysuckles. To the wicket gate of the bit of garden was appended a placard of "Mrs. Whilk's lodgings;" and here they stopped.

The mistress soon made her appearance, which was not unprepossessing. She was a tall woman, and strong-looking, rather under the middle age, and would have been good-looking but for a life of hardship which had bronzed her complexion and marked her with premature lines. Her voice was at first rather hard and masculine, but when she looked on the gentle beauty of Lucy, and the exhausted old Vicar, it dropped into the mildest tone of womanly sympathy.

"You want lodgings, ma'am," she said, forestall-

ing enquiry. "I have heard it from Dr. ——, and you are tired with travelling, and so is the good gentleman by your side. Let me help you out to see if mine are good enough."

"There can be no doubt," replied Lucy, at once taken with her feeling expression. "But did not our servants come yesterday?"

"No, ma'am; I was told to expect them, but they are not here yet."

"Why, uncle, what shall we do?"

We need not continue to indicate his imperfection of speech, because his improved intellect was learning to cure it by systematic brevity.

"We must do as well as we can," he replied, with a patient smile. "Didn't much expect 'em. Mrs. Bloomer wants 'em herself; look after Jim Crow."

Lucy thought it was too like her; and, as she looked upon her helpless uncle, she felt indignant and almost said so.

"Never mind, my dear, we shan't give much trouble."

"Lord, sir!" said Mrs. Whilk. "If that's all, what trouble can you give? I could look after as many more, and like it all the better. Only try, ma'am; and I'll warrant you shan't miss them!"

Lucy smiled her thanks. There was no alternative. When she had alighted, Mrs. Whilk carefully helped out the Vicar, and the driver followed them into the house with the few articles of luggage. In

another minute they were seated in a clean little upstairs apartment looking upon the sea, with two bed-rooms most conveniently opening from the opposite ends.

“Don’t fatigue yourself, ma’am, to ask me any questions, or give any orders. I know all that gentlefolks are used to, and can satisfy you in everything, as far as our out-of-the-way village affords it. But, before anything else, I will settle with the man and send him away ; and, whilst you are getting ready in your rooms, I’ll see to the tea kettle and frying pan.”

“I—like that woman ?” said the old man.

“And so do I, uncle ; I see that Providence has guided us, and that we shall be more comfortable without servants than with them. Let us see your room, where you can lie down till I unpack what you want, and then I will come back for you.”

It was not long before she brought him in his loose dressing-gown, and velvet cap and slippers, to a snowy white table cloth and the pleasant bubble of the tea urn, with the savour of seaside delicacies still hissing from the fire. There was an attention to cleanliness and comfort and a culinary skill in all the details which would have stimulated a way-faring appetite to no small exertions ; and as he knew what would please her he did his best, but could accomplish little more than a cheerful look and broken sentences which were meant to express high enjoyment. He raked about the contents of his plate, sipped once or twice at his cup, and

declared that he had never done such wonders in his life, which gave him a right to complain that she had done nothing herself.

"Oh ! but I will, uncle. I am exceedingly hungry !" and happily for herself and her charge she felt compelled to prove her assertion. And then, as the old man dropped off into his placid doze, she tinkled the bell, and Mrs. Whilk slipped softly in to remove the things.

"Don't you think, ma'am, I had better put him to bed ? I do anything in that way, and most others, for I have been a widow five years and more, and obliged to maintain my children by learning to be a man and woman too. Don't be afraid, ma'am ; there are only two of them, and I keep them quite out of hearing."

"I am not afraid, for I am sure that yours are well brought up, and I am very fond of children."

"Lord bless you, ma'am, for saying so. I'm sure I don't know what I should do without mine. You will be surprised when you see all that I can do. Ever since my poor husband was drowned in the herring fishing I've followed his occupation as close as I could. I've taken care of his nets and tackle, and can use them as well as any man hereabouts. I'm up and on the water by daylight, and have swept our little bay of the mullet and flounders long before the other people have got over their last night's drinking bout. Then my boys, that I've taught to be sea otters, turn to the lines farther out whilst I attend to my bathing

machine, which is the only one in the place ; and, after that, I do the indoor work and get breakfast for the lodgers, and then out again to row them wherever they want to go, till it is time to come home and dress the dinner."

" Why, Mrs. Whilk, how is it that you live through such toil ? "

" Oh ! that ain't half of it, ma'am ; and I feel as if I could do more still for the boys my husband left me. But I beg pardon, ma'am, for talking so much ; only I thought it would do you good if I could say anything to amuse you."

" You not only amuse but interest me very much. If you can bear up against all this, how much more easily should others bear up against the ordinary trials of life which so often sink them ? Do tell me more of yourself. What do you do during the long winter, when I suppose no lodgers are here ? "

" That's the time, ma'am, when I do the most. The large fish come closer in shore, and if it's a little dangerous (for we have a heavy sea here sometimes) I think my husband wasn't afraid of danger, and why should I be ? Except that there's nobody else to take care of the boys. But then it is better to take the chance than let them want bread. I'm sure you must be very tired, ma'am."

" On the contrary, you do me good, as you said just now. My thoughts are very sad, as you see they must be. They want stronger minds for example."

" Ah ! ma'am, the mind ! The mind sinks many

a one that a little courage would keep afloat. The sinews are the best doctors for all ailments there. How else could poor people, whose crust for their families depends on the luck of to-morrow, be able to get through the fears of to-day? Well, ma'am, the winter, as I was saying, is rather a dangerous time; but I keep a good heart, especially when it is moonlight and a hard frost."

" You do not go out at night?"

" Yes, ma'am, all night. My husband, you see, left his flat-bottomed boat and his swivel gun behind him; and so as soon as I've seen the boys to bed, I paddle away to a muddy creek that we have, six or seven miles off, for ducks and widgeons and what not."

" You shoot!"

" Oh, yes, ma'am; there's nothing else to be done; and whilst our men are spending their summer's earnings in the tap-room, I am paddling after thousands of wild fowl. Sometimes I get ten or twenty at once; and then I carry them to the railway and send them up to London. It's hard work, and a little awful to be alone on the stormy water at midnight, with the cries and screams of the birds overhead and all about you, and the whistling of wings that, when it is dark, will almost hit against your head! And then the sound of the swivel gun, with a quarter of a pound of swan shot, seems like a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder to show where a lone woman may be robbed and murdered by the boats' crews, going drunk from one collier to an-

other. But still, it is rather grand for those that are not afraid."

"With your motives, Mrs. Whilk, I should call it sublime! I believe one of the greatest of human virtues is fortitude—not that mock fortitude of which the parent is pride, nor that baser quality which arises from want of feeling, but that which resigns us to trials past, and enables us to struggle without mistrust against those that threaten."

"Yes, ma'am, yes; where it is real it is a security for all other good, for it is too high-minded to skulk from the consequences of evil doing. But, Lord ha' mercy, ma'am, what has all this to do with you, who never did anything but good in your life, and never could do anything but study the best way to that place where the good are sure of their reward? The old gentleman, ma'am, is sound asleep; and, if you please, I'll wheel him into his room."

He was removed without waking, and the door closed.

The conversation of this persevering woman, simple as it was, and apparently irrelevant to the case of Lucy, was not ill-timed. It was like the infusion of fresh blood into veins that are well-nigh exhausted. She felt that her energies had been deserting her just when she most needed them, and determined to brood less upon what had been or might be; and in this train she continued to reason with herself till the calmness she had assumed became more natural. Her eye was brighter

for the tears so long suppressed, and when Mrs. Whilk returned her voice was more cheerful.

"How have you left him?" she asked.

"As well as he can be, ma'am; for I no sooner got him into bed than he fell fast asleep again. And now, if I may advise, it is time you should get to sleep too. You ought to take care of yourself, for you are far from strong, ma'am!"

She then lighted her to her room, redolent of lavender and pure as the cup of a lily, and would not wish her good night till she saw her lay her head upon her pillow; where the plashing sound of the waves, that seemed to rock the cottage, gradually lulled her into calm forgetfulness.

When morning returned the atmosphere was soft and brilliant, and the tide was rolling in sapphire to the feet of the many isolated chalk pinnacles. Dappled groups were busy with their boats for the day's labour, and giving life to a harmony of contrasts that seemed to tingle with delight.

On entering the sitting-room, Lucy found Mrs. Whilk bringing in the wonders of her frying-pan, and her uncle comfortably seated, and carefully costumed, as when they had parted for the night. He had rested well, and declared he had not been so happy since the day before he was married. His breakfast was much more business-like than the vain pretence of yesterday, and when she placed his chair by the open window she felt assured that his lips had never received the enemy that reduced him to his present state, as they now opened to inhale

the breath of that effulgent element before them, scattering health and rejoicing with its prodigal surge, and drowning every care of life even as it tided over the rocks in its own bosom.

“ Well, uncle,” said Lucy, seated opposite to him. “ Do you think we have done right to run away ?”

“ Never did anything so right before !”

“ You will soon get well here.”

“ Quite well already ; wanting to run away ever since married.”

“ Oh, but we must go back sometimes, you know, for aunt is left entirely alone.”

“ No hurry. Got curate and Jim Crow.”

“ I have been considering I ought to write to her.”

“ Leave her alone—soon forget us.”

“ Do you not wish to return home ?”

“ No !” The negative was very decided ; and he chuckled like a child that has played a clever trick, till Lucy thought it was time to stop him, and ask if he would like to hear her read.

“ Like—everything you do,” he replied ; and so would many others have done, for Lucy’s voice was just what might have been expected from such lips.

There was no seeking for books, for the one of which he stood most in need was in her hand already. Once it had been the treasure of his own, till, sore beset, like Bunyan’s Pilgrim, with matrimonial turmoil, he had journeyed to the enchanted land around Mr. Cheek’s gin-bottle and fallen asleep.

And, truth to say, a pretty good sleep he had made of it, for he now met the saints and patriarchs of his early acquaintance almost as strangers. By degrees, however, this tranquil recall of former customs removed the mist that had gathered over them; and, in two or three more such days, not only were other signs of memory appearing, like fresh grafts on the tree where the old had withered, but a more rapid renovation of strength, and corresponding faculties of mind. Lucy might have felt almost free to take some thought of pleasure for herself, had not troubles from new sources and other quarters been daily pouring in upon her.

The first of these was in her correspondence with Goldsworthy, where Lady Goldfield's shock at her son's ruin was followed by a far greater one for his life, which was now threatened by a dangerous fever, not surprising after the pains he had taken to acquire it, and spreading its effects even upon Lucy, whose prospect of a happy reunion at Sea Cliff was now, of course, at an end. Another grief came in a letter from Crowley, containing all he had meant to say in the visit he had been prevented from making, and the strange history of the letters which still detained him. It was the first discovery of her loss, and again she was indebted to the influence which appeared destined to preside over her always, which she could only repay with a show of ingratitude, and indifference quite as deceptive. Sad indeed was it to write on either of these subjects, of which every post brought a renewal, and the fortitude she had

envied was farther than ever from supporting her. Both the Vicar and their kind attendant perceived an alteration in her, but believed it caused by over watchfulness. They reminded her that she had not quitted the house since her arrival, and insisted on her taking more care of herself.

“ Ma’am,” said Mrs. Whilk, “ if you do not go out, I am certain you will fall ill, and then what’s to become of the poor old gentleman ?”

Lucy in vain protested that she was perfectly well, but she felt the force of Mrs. Whilk’s argument, and consented to follow her advice, not when she might be wanted, but early in the morning, before her uncle awoke.

“ Do you go out in your boat to-morrow ?”

“ Yes, ma’am, as soon as the tide serves, which will be about seven o’clock.”

“ Then call me, and I will go with you.”

The unexpected events resulting from this compliance must fill another and a more stirring chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

HAVING always been an early riser, for the enjoyment of the only hours she could call her own, Lucy was prepared in good time. The novelty of the adventure, and a slight sensation of timidity had caused some diversion of more painful reflections, and given a fresh tint to her cheek, and a sparkle to her eyes, which might have been better suited to a fabled nautilus of old, not yet forgotten by our classic school-boy, than to the tiny craft in waiting for her; and when her picturesque guide had placed her on board, and she felt the first undulations of the pure element, she could almost have believed in the possibility of pleasure. Mrs. Whilk plied the sculls with a dexterity that scarcely raised a ripple, and her two ruddy boys lay down upon the net, and poured over the bows at the minute life that was crawling and darting beneath them. As she rose and sank over the measured swell, Lucy thought her heart was made lighter to surmount it, and had spirit to laugh at the causeless fear with which she clung to her seat. Even

this was soon over, for Mrs. Whilk was too considerate to make the first voyage a discouragement, and, in a few hundred yards, brought them round a broken landslip into a small cove, alive with its feathered inhabitants. The blue shadows, diversified below with darker indications of caverns, and above by the ruby-tinted summits, completely enclosed the sandy beach, except one or two rugged vistas.

"Here, ma'am," said Mrs. Whilk, as the boat glided ashore, "is a nice quiet place for you to walk about and watch us, without danger of being disturbed, for nobody can get to it afoot, and those that have boats go farther out. Don't be afraid to let me lift you, for I am strong enough to carry a whole forest of such flowers. And now, you Tom and Harry, run the net across the inlet, and wait till I come to you."

The urchins paddled away in high glee, whilst their mother conducted Lucy to a rocky seat, where the spoils were to be drawn out.

"This, ma'am, is where I always bring my lodgers to see the prettiest prospect we have got, for out of this dark little hiding-place you have miles of the sunny coast, and are no more to be distinguished yourself than one of these birds from another. We've a great many such places along here, and I sometimes find them very handy, because this is an out-of-the-way part of the world, and it is best for a lone woman to keep a good look-out before venturing too far from land."

"For what reason? Is there any danger?"

"Well, ma'am, there's no saying sometimes when it blows hard, and the French and Dutch fishermen are allowed to put in for safety. They are not always a pleasant looking lot. In fine weather, like this, they have no excuse, and the revenue cutter keeps 'em off."

"I hope you have more confidence in the people of your own village?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, there's no harm in them, when they are sober; but the mischief is that they are not always so, and a drunken man don't know what he's a doing. They are honest enough in most respects, but they don't think it much harm to cheat the excise, and doing a bit of smuggling, which makes spirits cheap, and gives 'em a sort of credit amongst one another. Sometimes there'll be four or five boats across the water in the same night, and as many fires lighted in the rocks by those that are keeping watch at home to show them whereabouts they may land without running against the coast-guard, and then they either bring their kegs ashore, or sink 'em where some landmark, such as the point where two cliffs cut crosswise, helps 'em to draw a line where they may drag for them when all is safe. We had a sharp run last night, when the 'Cockle Shell'—that rakish snake of a schooner that you see lying at her moorings yonder—was chased in by the 'Kittywake'; but she sank her kegs before they caught her. Commodore Bunckle, as they call him, because he is the head of all these do-no-goods, has been caught too often to be trapped as he used to be."

“Bunckle?” repeated Lucy.

“Yes, ma’am; what startled you?”

“The name! It is the name of a poor girl in the place I come from; and her father is just such a man as you describe.”

“Not Nelly, surely?”

“Yes, Nelly! You surprise me.”

“I am surprised myself. You come from Broome Warren, ma’am?”

“I do. What know you of Nelly?”

“I knew her well, four or five years ago. She was a good girl, and deserved a better father; and now, as I have heard, she deserves a better master.”

“She does, indeed. Good heavens, Mrs. Whilk! I am easily alarmed. I have recently had good cause to be so. If this Bunckle should hear my name, I might be followed and found unprotected by you know not what horror.”

“Indeed, ma’am. Then I hope nobody knows you are come here.”

“None, I think, from whom he would be likely to hear it.”

“Dear Lord! Could any one intend evil to such as you! But the cause is plain enough in your face, ma’am, and needs no conjuror to understand it. Don’t be alarmed, ma’am, for nobody here knows your name, or the old gentleman’s either; and if they did, they would not find you unprotected. There’s nobody comes here without my knowing it, and Lieutenant Brown of the ‘Kitty-

wake,' which is the revenue cutter, there at anchor, has many a time been my lodger, and will do anything to serve me, even to setting a guard in my cot."

Lucy became more uneasy at the thought of such a necessity.

"There is no knowing, ma'am. When people keep watch over such as you they are pretty sharp-sighted. It is no such great distance from Broome Warren, and here was a man from it, not long ago, to see the Commodore."

"From Broome Warren! What was his name?"

"I did not hear; but others might come as well. Here's one stranger here now that I cannot quite make out. He came the day after the other went away, and seems more of a gentleman, though he has taken up his lodging at The Three Sprats."

Lucy asked quickly—

"What sort of a gentleman?"

"Not a first-rate one, I should say, for he does not seem to wear his own clothes. He walks about like one of our seamen in a new suit, but without his sea legs; and then he was drinking with Bunckle as soon as he came ashore last night, and almost into this morning. I know it, for I was obliged to be out at low water, which was very late, to fetch in my lobster pots—Hey! Look there, ma'am!"

And she pointed to a small tub of a boat that was passing at a short distance towards the 'Cockle

Shell,' with one person pulling and another sitting in the stern.

"That's Bunckle's dingey. And that looks like the stranger I was speaking of. Look, ma'am, if you know him."

Lucy looked intently, but it was too far to distinguish features.

"Never mind, ma'am. Whilst he is shut out by that rock we'll haul in the net and go home, and then I'll learn more about him."

The boys leaped into the water, and taking a rope at each end of the net pulled vigorously towards the shore, when the bobbing of the corks, and the flashing of the spray in the enclosed semi-circle, promised great success. The spoils were soon dragged out upon the yellow sand; a multitude of all shapes and colours, under the halo of a miniature rainbow that would have claimed Lucy's wonder, had it not been too much engaged by the past conversation. All were then tumbled together and tossed into the boat, and as Mrs. Whilk again lent her careful offices, she whispered confidentially—

"Don't flurry yourself, ma'am; it would do a mischief to the old gentleman. Lieutenant Brown is sure to be ashore presently, and you shall be guarded by the king's own."

The promise was kept in less than two hours, when a couple of fine fellows of the customs were enlisted for the garrison, with which they were well pleased, as it proved a much better quarter than their own. Lucy saw them march in, and it

was enough to put Cox out of her thoughts. At the worst, she could fear nothing but some attempt at a scene like that at Goldsworthy ; and probably the stranger was somebody else. In any case she was prepared, and the day went by as usual, except that it showed symptoms of a change.

As night approached the moon was obscured by thick clouds, and the wind began to get up with an admonition to draw the fishing-boats higher up the beach ; and the "Kittywake" and the "Cockle Shell" were moving farther out to sea. They soon ceased to be visible, and it became very dark, while the waves sounded ominous of a storm.

Mrs. Whilk entered with the candles, and suggested that Mr. Bloomer had best be put to bed in case of agitation from thunder and lightning, a counsel which he was more inclined to take from having been slightly fatigued by a walk on the sands. He required but little help, and was soon made comfortable for the night.

Lucy, with a natural curiosity to witness a storm upon the sea, remained at the window, upon which the wind did not set directly ; and, when Mrs. Whilk left her, she extinguished the light for a better view through the gloom. But, contrary to expectation, there was no storm, though a dreary roar,—a sound of desolation which gradually stole upon her heart with a sense of dread of she knew not what. Perhaps stronger materials are not always proof against it, and are apt to imagine the rougher voice of Nature an angry menace upon the loved, the

absent, or the unfortunate. Lucy was dwelling upon all these, when something—she supposed a boat—was propelled over the white line of surge, and disappeared amongst the black shadows of the shore. Fishermen, most likely, who had ventured out too far, and were glad to make land, even at the expense of some damage. She saw nothing more, and continued pensively musing upon her lonely position, with nothing to depend upon but the precarious life of a tottering old man, and the compassion of those upon whom she had no claim. They were not reflections to inspire much courage; and she was just about to require a great deal.

Having extinguished her lights, she was not visible from below, but from the room beneath her, inhabited by Mrs. Whilk, a bright ray was shot into the night by a candle still burning. Believing she heard something more than the wind, she looked below, and, to her great amazement, beheld an uncouth marine monster making a stealthy inquisition of the interior. She sprang from her chair, and was about to ring violently for her landlady, when she perceived her standing close behind him.

“ Well, Commodore !” she said to her startled eavesdropper, “ how do you like the look of my rush light ?”

“ Hallo !” he hiccupped. “ Is that you, mother Whilk ? I thought it was the ‘ Kittywake !’ I came to see whether you were at home.”

“ And hoped I was not ! What do you want

here, screwing your crumpled brandy face into people's windows, as if you meant to break in?"

"Break in! No, mother, I only looked to see if you were as handsome as ever; so do be pleasant, for I've not seen you this long while."

"Is that all?" replied Mrs. Whilk, rather changing her tone to find out his purpose. "Well, and what have you been doing this long while? Have you been to jail again?"

"No; not just lately; only cruising off and on to fetch you a keg of cognac."

"With a passenger who went on board for his health, hey?"

"How did you know that?"

"Why, because I saw him. Who is he?"

"Who? How should I know?"

"If you don't, I do. He left a tell-tale hat in his room at the Sprats, and his name is Cox."

Lucy almost cried out.

"Come; tell us what he is doing here, for we are old friends, you know, and perhaps I may be of service to him."

The Commodore looked at her doubtfully, and considered, and then looked again.

"Be of service, do you say? Well, that's worth thinking about. You might lend a hand, that's certain. But then you see——"

"See what?"

"You mightn't; that's all; and so it's no use

troubling you, when you've so many things to think about. They say you have let your lodgings."

"Yes, Commodore; a good thing for a poor widow that must pick up a few shillings how she can. It is hard work. I wish you'd tell me how to do it easier."

"And so I was just thinking I might, if you had a mind."

"Well then, how?"

"Ten or twenty pounds wouldn't be a bad help."

"A fortune to the like of me."

Lucy could hear her heart beat. It was evidently an encounter of wits, of which she herself was to be the prize.

"Ten or twenty pounds," continued the keen woman, with a look of intelligence at Lucy's window. "I could do almost anything for that!"

"No. Could you though? You see ten or twenty down might be ten or twenty every now and then, if it was well-earned—a regular hincome; for he has lots of money, and you'd be doing a power of good at the same time."

"I dare say! I'm sure you'd never advise a poor widow woman to do anything that is not good."

"Lord love you! Not for kegs enough to turn the ocean into grog! What—and these lodgers? An old gent and a young lady, ain't they? We mustn't make mistakes."

"An old gent and a young lady. No mistake."

"Any friends with 'em ?"

"None."

"How many servants ?"

"None."

"What—quite without help like ?"

"Only mine ?"

"That's what I made a particular condition, for they might have broke the peace, and I never set myself agin the law, except the excise, which you know is nothing ; and one or two other laws of no account."

"Oh, no ; everybody knows that."

"In course—and these two—that is, the young lady and my gent, are old acquaintance, and she's a-dying to be off with him."

"You don't say so ?"

"True as you're there ! He has been a-telling me so hisself all day ; for I said I wouldn't have nothing to do with it at first. The poor thing, you see, is a breaking her heart ; and the old gent has brought her here a-purpose to keep her out of the young gent's way. You couldn't steal away his pistols, could you, just to prevent accidents ? He carries two brace and a cutlass, and has took his oath he'll blow my gent's brains out and cut him into four quarters the first time he sees him. Terrible, ain't it ?"

"Terrible ! I shouldn't have thought it !"

"Oh, it's all true ! He's obliged to bring the

young woman a bottle of stuff to hold to his nose, for fear he should wake and do murder?"

"A bottle of stuff, eh?"

"Yes; I forget the name—chlori—something. We've settled that he's to slip up stairs, and, when they've put the old gent fast asleep, she's to pretend to be asleep herself, just to excuse herself for not crying out."

"Rarely planned, Commodore. You must have been more sober than common to settle things so cleverly. But let us hear the rest indoors."

"Well, I'll just go and have a talk with my gent, and be back with you in five minutes."

"No, no; we'll have it all between ourselves. I've got a good name to keep up. Come in, and let us understand one another, and your gent can come afterwards. I saw him with half a dozen of your fellows, just below; so we must make haste. Come in, for who knows where the custom-house men may be. What you do must be done without noise."

"That's quite the truth. Come in then; for this is the sort of night we want, and there's no time to spare."

And so the pair vanished round the back of the house; Mrs. Whilk again casting a glance at the window with her finger to her lips. In another minute she stole softly up stairs.

"Hush, ma'am, or we may have the rest of them here! You heard all from the window, and know as much as I do."

"But why have you brought that man into the house?"

"To make him safe, ma'am. I have taken him to the kitchen, and made him acquainted with our revenue men, who have got their hint not to let him go. But that's not enough. His crew are close by, and when they find he doesn't return they'll come after him. Our two men will be no match for so many, and I must pull off to the cutter for more strength. I won't trust a soul here, for this gent, as they call him, has made the whole village drunk."

"You will leave me to their mercy!"

"You are in good hands, ma'am. I shall not be gone half an hour. Be quite quiet. Lock the door after me; and, if they try the window, call out to our men below."

"Take me with you! I will not stay!"

"You *must*, ma'am. Suppose we should meet them! If they see *me* by myself, they'll think all right, and that I'm about my usual business; but if they saw *you*, how could I help you? Do as I tell you, and fear nothing."

Lucy followed her down stairs to lock her out, and was left in a state of mind which she would never have thought possible. It had been the extreme of fear, but it was not so now. Fear has been sublimated by its own intenseness into higher material than courage; and instead of sinking helpless she found herself a heroine. In feeling her way back to her window, just distinguishable by the faint glare from the one below, she placed her hand

upon the table and was reminded that Mrs. Whilk, in haste to secure her boat, had not cleared it. Strange as it may seem, her heart bounded at the touch of a sharp knife, long used, and worn to a thin and keen extremity. She grasped it, as heaven-sent, and wildly resolved, that if her persecutor entered that room he should not live to go out of it. Thus, between frenzy and ghast attention to every sound, she passed half of the time by which her providential protectress had promised to return, when a thrill shot through her whole frame from a ring at the garden gate! Now was the moment to try her resolution! They had come in search of their spy!

At least, such was her first belief. But, if such was their 'object, why did they ring instead of entering? Could it be a rescue? If so, what could it be; and why, again, did they stop to ring? Whatever it was, the ring was repeated, though, as in the first instance, scarcely audible for the wind. Sometimes she fancied she heard voices, and the tramp of horses going away. What could it mean? Her conjectures were stopped suddenly by the wind slamming the gate, and once more beholding some one close to the house, at which, after looking in vain for a bell, he tapped with a stick. It was not loud enough to be heard in the back premises, on such a night; and the very different appearance from any she had expected still fixed her to the spot. After knocking again, the new comer looked up as if surprised at receiving no answer. The

glimpse was enough, and produced a cry of convulsive joy—"Gracious heaven, I am coming! I am coming!"

She was at the door, as if darkness had been brighter than daylight, and, wrenching round the key, seized a hand which she prized beyond a host. Crowley had that evening obtained the address of Cox from the Broome Warren Post Office, and had galloped at his utmost speed for more than fifty miles.

So astonished was he at her manner, that he could scarce ask the cause of it, till she almost forced him in, and again secured the door, when a few breathless words informed him of the projected outrage. His plan was formed before she had done speaking, and he only asked where he should find the Commodore, whilst she ran upstairs to renew her watch.

CHAPTER XII.

THE entrance of a stranger created some sensation. Bunckle, who had been all along in a glow at the unexpected civilities of government, with whom he was actually at supper, jumped up with a momentary hope that his own party had come to partake of it. His entertainers jumped up also, and thrust their hands into their breast pockets for something that was not drawn forth. The first full view of their new visitor satisfied them that such an exterior could bring no cause for mistrust.

“Don’t disturb yourselves,” he said, “I may want you presently, but I must first have a little conversation with this gentleman, who, I believe, is Captain Bunckle of the Cockle Shell.”

“That’s my name, sir,” replied the Commodore, not remarkably reassured by a certain tone of authority; “but I can’t tell how you came to know it. I hope to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance another time, but the society of these gentlemen has made me forget what’s o’clock. The

wind is getting worser and worser, and my craft ain't safe; and so, if you please, I'll say good-night."

"I am sorry I cannot part with you just yet, Captain Bunckle, for I reckon upon your very much increasing the pleasure of our party by inviting in and presenting us to your friend, Captain Cox."

"Captain Cox?"

"Yes; the gentleman who has engaged your vessel and your good offices for carrying off a young lady residing in this house."

"Lord, sir, you don't say so? A good many people come aboard of us, a yachting, as they call it, and in course it's no business of mine to enquire what they are up to."

"Be advised, and don't get yourself into greater trouble, for we know more than you suspect. In the first place I am a magistrate for this county, and in the next, you are my prisoner. Now choose whether you will go to Lympton Jail with the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, or lighten it by such evidence as will convict your employer. Whatever you may determine upon is only material to yourself, as I have no doubt we shall obtain what we want by searching you."

Mr. Bunckle was rather confounded. A search would probably dispossess him of a large sum which he had received for prospective services, and Lympton jail would be the first day's journey to Portland Island, or some other such place of industry. He had not long to deliberate, for Crowley made a

sign to the officers to see what he had in his pockets.

“Stay, I say! Zounds, what are you going to be at? Won’t you give a man time to answer? In course I’m a honest man, everybody knows that, and a voluntary witness, else what did I come here for?”

“We’ll attend to that by-and-bye. At present you have only to tell us how to lay hands upon Captain Cox.”

“He’s here, close by; let me go and fetch him.”

“They are breaking into the house!” cried Lucy, springing in, and clinging to the side of Crowley, “I hear them trying the window!”

“Never mind, they’ll find us ready. Now, Captain Bunckle, if you happen to have such a thing as a pistol about you, which no doubt you have, oblige me by the loan of it.”

“Lord, sir, don’t mention such a thing! We always carry pistols about us for fear of accidents,” and he pulled out an old ship’s pistol, as long as his arm.

“That will do. I’ll trust to its being loaded; and now, as we cannot spare you out of doors to invite Captain Cox in, I must trouble you to come with me to an upper window for that service. I only warn you that if you give him a word or a sign that he is not safe, the contents of this engine, whatever they may be, will go through your head. Make no noise whilst I help you upstairs, and do exactly as I

direct. Do you two stand by the entrance door, and shape your work according to what you hear. Pray show us the way, Miss Longland."

They were presently looking down upon several daring fellows, cautiously trying the door and the window, and the light was still bright enough to exhibit Captain Cox.

"Whisht!" whispered Bunckle, thrusting his head forward, with the pistol close behind it. "Don't make such a bother below, there! You'll wake the whole house!"

"Are you there?" returned Cox, in the same thief-like voice. "I thought you had deserted us. How did you get there?"

"The landlady let me in. I've made her all right, and she is gone off to look to her crab pots."

"Where are the others?"

"In their rooms, fast asleep. Be quiet till I find my way down to you. Let the men slip away and have the boat ready. What the deuce did you bring 'em here for? We shall have the revenue chaps upon us. Be off, and tread lightly, and don't say a word."

"But we may want them!"

"Do as I tell you. Go along with you all, or I'm blest if I don't cry thieves."

The commodore was peremptory, and the besiegers were quickly off the premises.

"Wait a bit, captain. Let them have time to get to their oars, and then I'll let you in."

He then drew in his head.

“ There, Mr.—I forget your name—haven’t I behaved honourable, that’s all !”

Crowley begged Lucy to stay where she was, and not to be alarmed if she heard a commotion below. With which he descended, with the same precaution. At the door stood the two sentinels, whom a word was sufficient to prepare, and the commodore, firmly clenched by the collar, turned the key.

“ Whisht, captain ; where are you ?”

The captain was there.

“ Mind how you come, it’s very dark.”

The captain entered, spreading out his arms to feel his way, when he found them grasped with a vice on each side, and himself kicking and floundering into the passage.

“ Hey—how—hell and the devil, what’s this ?”

“ On with the darbies !” cried the commodore, whilst Crowley re-locked the door. “ We must have no bustle, you know, captain ! You’ll wake the house !”

Before he knew where he was, the captain was securely handcuffed, and dragged before the kitchen table, where he found another astonishment in seeing at the opposite end the last face on earth he expected. It brought his tongue to a sudden stop, of which Mr. Bunckle again took advantage to prove himself an honest man.

“ There, your worship ! There’s the culprit what I bring before you for forcing away a hinnocent

young lady, as wouldn't go, and giving of her stuff to make her unsensible, as, Lord be praised, she hasn't took. Let alone the houtrageous wickedness of bribing a respectable fair trader to go agin his conscience, and carry wictims contraband."

In order to make the case quite clear, Captain Cox had begun at the same time to demand by whose authority he had been seized and hand-cuffed, and hauled about like a housebreaker. But before he had done one sentence he was off in another, with his late best friend full cry after him, with a sort of cat-o'-nine tails of fresh crimes. Cox stunned them with a proclamation of delicate lungs and recommendations to the sea-side, where he had pursued Bunckle for robbing him into that den of thieves, and expected to be murdered into the bargain. The Commodore yelled a tempest of scorn at the delicate lungs which had forced them to be all night drunk at the ale-house, and instead of committing a robbery had been robbed of his own good name! Then friend Crowley, however he got to such a place, would be robbed and murdered too, and tossed into the sea with a stone round his neck! And then friend Cox was to be proved, under his own handwriting, the biggest villain that ever swang from a gibbet, where friend Bunckle would be cursed if he didn't whistle a gale of wind, and anchor on to his heels!

Amidst this uproar the wrath of Crowley was none of the mildest, and required all his self-com-

mand. Seeing no chance of a pause, his decided voice was heard through the hoarser bluster.

“Feel his pockets, my men, for a small bottle, and take care you don’t break it.”

“The breast pocket!” shouted Bunckle. “I saw him put it there.”

The Captain’s struggles were of no avail, and a bottle, labelled chloroform, was extracted and handed to Crowley, to the great satisfaction of the Commodore, who was probably not accustomed to such ready corroboration.

“Now, Mr. Roley, or Shoaley, or whatever it is, what do you want next? Anythink you ask in the way of justice, I’m your man.”

This atrocity brought Captain Cox to his legal resources.

“Take notice, Mr. Crowley, you have robbed me! A most decided, open, barefaced robbery! Mind how you act upon the evidence of thieves. It is no concern of mine; not the least; not an atom. But upon my life, I advise you, I do indeed, to take care what you are about, and not to get up a case to suit your own interest, and be settled by your own judgment.”

The forensic caution had no effect, and was not attended to.

“Now, Mr. Bunckle, you had something to prove under the prisoner’s own handwriting?”

“To be sure I have. No letters, ’cause I only come last night, and we was drunk till this morning; but here’s something as ’ll do as well. Here’s

the money he gave me, and here's something better, for he hadn't got enough, and wrote me a cheque upon his bankers for more, with his own name signed at the end of it. Let him get over that! There it is!"

With which he smacked down upon the table the miscellaneous treasures of his trousers pockets. Crowley selected a crumpled envelope, from which he drew forth a roll of bank notes, and the cheque with the Captain's signature.

"Sir—Mr. Crowley! I protest—I insist! This is a violation of all the laws of society! An outrage! A scandal! An abomination! No gentleman ever yet disgraced himself by prying into the private affairs of another! I'll bring an action in every Court in Europe! I'll appeal to both Houses of Parliament! I'll give bail to any amount, and dare you to refuse it! I'll—I'll—I'll"—but, before he could say what he would do next, he was brought up by a loud knocking at the door.

Alas, it was no rescue, but just the reverse! It was the return of Mrs. Whilk with her levies from the 'Kittywake,' and their dashing young officer at the head of them.

"There!" said the exhausted woman, who had pulled over the rough sea with speed enough to break her heart. "There's the very man! There's Cox! Thank God, they have got him somehow! And there's the Commodore! This gentleman," pointing to Crowley, "I don't know, but he seems to have dropped from the sky!"

“My brave Mrs. Whilk, Miss Longland will tell you I am no enemy. Pray bring her down stairs, for she can now help us.”

“I am here,” cried Lucy, bounding in, for she had good excuse for listening, and clasping his arm too.

“Now, Captain Cox, it concerns you to be quiet, and give your best attention to another charge.”

Both Cox and Bunckle, the one in triumph and the other in terror, held their breath to hear what it was.

“I have to acquaint you that warrants are all over the country for your apprehension. Miss Longland, can you tell me to whom these letters belong?” and he produced the packet.

“To me!” she cried, “to me!” Receiving them with a burst of hysterical tears. “My father’s letters! The best—the only treasures I possess!”

“I took them from a ruffian in the employ of that man, for whom he stole them by the aid of Mrs. Toogood’s maid-servant and a cottage girl, both of whom will appear against him on his trial; for which, in addition to his worse exploit, I shall now commit him.”

Cox was now quite beside himself with terror, though louder than ever with bravado. Her letters! What should he want with her letters or herself? Where was the young Miss who did not think herself a jewel that every man was burning to run away with; and a genius for scribbling rubbish that everybody was dying to read? Where was the

chamber-maid that would not lie, steal, and rummage, and swear the blame to the devil knows who ; and when did she want a witness when there was another trull in the neighbourhood ? Who was the ruffian in his employ, when he came to Broome Warren with no servant at all ? What was his name ? Where did he come from ? Where was he gone to ? He knew no ruffian but Bunckle, and he wished them all joy of him !

“ Thank'e, my dear ; I wish you the same ! ” was the cordial response, “ and I'll tell you all about the ruffian ; who he is, and where he is, and what he's going to do ; for I heard he was locked-up the day after I last saw him. Aaron's the man ! Aaron Daunt ! and he means to turn King's evidence agin you, and what d'ye think of that ? ”

Lucy again uttered a cry of astonishment, and so almost did Crowley.

“ Aaron Daunt ? ” she said, “ a confederate of Captain Cox ! *He* deceive me ! ”

“ I know the whole history of that night in the Vicarage garden,” replied Crowley, “ and have sought him everywhere, whilst I had him safe in prison ! You now see for whom the villain was plotting.”

It is not wonderful if, under such circumstances, Lucy discarded all farther service from a most faithful friend.

Crowley then wrote down her few words of evidence, and that of Bunckle, and the two revenue men, and read it unheard to Cox, who had no ques-

tions to ask them. Nothing remained but to find a safe lock-up for the night, with which Sea Cliff was too virtuous to be provided. The Lieutenant, however, offered a very secure one on board the ‘Kitty-wake,’ and an escort for the next morning, which was thankfully accepted; and Crowley declared his intention of preceding the party to Lympton, because, he said, he was somewhat personally interested in the case, and wished to place it, for the observance of all due formalities, in the hands of another magistrate.

The officer was then wishing good night and offering his congratulations upon the unexplained capture, for which the Commodore, most unfortunately for himself, was a trifle too ambitious to monopolize the credit.

“*I did it, sir, I did it!* and I hope the ‘Kitty-wake’ and ‘Cockle Shell’ will be better friends in future! It was me as gave the information! It was me who coaxed him in! And now, gents both, if you’ll be so good as to hand me the bank notes and the cheque, I’ll wish you good night and look arter my wessal.”

“Stop a moment!” exclaimed Crowley, “you remind me of a great omission I had nearly made!” and he resumed his pen to write hastily upon two separate sheets of paper, which he presented to the young sailor.

“Here, sir, is the commitment of Captain Bunckle for conspiracy, proved by the bribes in his own pocket; and here is another for all his crew whom

we can prove guilty of attempting to break into the house."

" You could not give me a more acceptable office. I'll have them as soon as I get on board ! Make haste, my men, and link these two fellows together."

" Not *me*, in course !" expostulated Mr. Bunckle, with eyes as wide as his mouth. " I'm a witness ! You can't take *me* !"

But, notwithstanding the impossibility, the Commodore and the Captain were coupled together and tumbled off to their quarters. The latter swearing by the Duke of —— and the Marquess of —— that nothing should persuade him to go ; and both of them fighting and relieving their hearts with a volley of such additions as seem, in extreme cases, to give great consolation.

How long the conversation might have lasted after this scene, or what interesting materials it might have brought to our history, had Mrs. Whilk and her guards been somewhere else, we are unable to conjecture. It was better to say farewell for the night than endanger the hopes of the next day, and Crowley himself was the first to suggest his departure. Mrs. Whilk commissioned one of the men to guide him to the house which had been engaged by Lady Goldfield, and conducted Lucy exhausted to her room.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN they quitted the house they found the night more blustering, and the sea in a state not often witnessed. The wind came from everywhere, and the waves were beaten down to a flat surface of foam, from which everything seemed to have been cut away by the sweep of a razor. There was a moon somewhere, but they could not tell where, though it was sufficient to show there was nothing afloat in the shape of a boat or vessel of any kind.

"A dangerous night, sir," said Crowley's guide, pausing under shelter of the cliffs, and looking anxiously in all directions. "There will be fearful accidents to-night. Hardly anything could live, and I see nothing of the 'Kittywake' or the 'Cockle Shell.' Heaven send they have cleared the rocks!"

Crowley was no less alarmed. It was a mercy, he said, the bay was not like that when Mrs. Whilk was out. They might never have seen her again.

"Indeed, sir, I think not. It is often bad in the

Equinox, which is just now, but I never saw it so bad before."

"Where should the two boats be?"

"They are both gone. This hurricane must have sprung up since they left shore. It is wild enough to have carried them out of sight whilst we were talking in the house. Come, sir, we have not far to go."

They soon reached the other lodging, where Crowley was readily accommodated. His companion then hastened back, leaving him to keep watch at his window nearly all the night. The more elevated position extended his view over a wide expanse of turmoil, but nothing appeared upon it but the many-shaped and phantom-like formations of chalk and sable rock, diminishing as far as he could see, with tossings of flying foam, that howled of worse beneath. Such a scene would, at any time, have been alarming for the fate of those exposed to it, but he was now personally concerned for a great many lives risked by himself. He questioned whether he had been justified in accepting the lieutenant's proposal to take his two prisoners on board, and felt that his warrant for the Commodore's crew would stimulate both parties to daring quite desperate enough had there been no tempest to increase it; and yet he knew not what else he could have done, though he would gladly have purchased their safety at the same hazard of his own. With fresh forebodings at every gust, he continued looking on till the east began to redden and mark .

the horizon, and the wind to abate its fury, but still the dim line was cleft by no splinter of a mast, and no rag of canvas.

As soon as it was light enough to see his way, he went out upon the beach, which he paced in solitude till the sun rose from a bed of tumbled clouds, as if it had been suddenly aroused from a fit, and the sea seemed only panting with its exertions. But there was nothing but a barren waste. The fishermen, who had all been housed in good time, were beginning to push off along shore, and he stayed till they returned, one by one, but all without tidings. So far the chances were favourable, for the tide was running in, and brought no vestiges of wreck ; but then the vessels might have foundered in deep water, without breaking up. There was nothing very hopeful, and he climbed one height after another for a better view, till the little town awakened to its ordinary occupations. It was so he was found by the never-resting Mrs. Whilk, who had been seeking him to say that Lucy was up and expecting him.

“ Don’t be afraid, sir, for the cutter or the schooner. They are old acquaintance, and know the ground below water as well as above. It is of no use to strain your eyes here, for they are forty miles off before now, and it is easily accounted for. When the Commodore’s men found he did not get back to them, they sheered off to take care of themselves, and you may be sure the lieutenant was not far behind, and will not return till he brings them with

him. You won't see them to-day nor to-morrow neither, but there's no danger, so come along, sir, come along to breakfast."

Lucy received him with more at her heart than on her lips, and she wept for want of words. It was a joy that a grand portion of the distress and too evident suspicion with which he had bidden adieu to her at Oakendell, were now scattered to the winds; but other doubts remained which she could not remove, and a reservation of any trust in him had become a reproach that was traceable in every look and every tone of her voice. Though this was nothing new to him—for she had confessed it in their first evening at Oakendell—it had never been so visible as now, yet he had not courage to make farther remarks upon it with the painful recollection of the effect he had then produced. He had promised never to renew the subject, and he felt she must be left to her own discretion, however long it might oppose some chimerical obstacle to his happiness and, he almost flattered himself, her own. That it *was* chimerical there was no question, for his insane mistake in respect to Cox had convinced him that no mystery injurious to herself was in the range of possibilities. To whom then *could* it be injurious? It now first occurred to him that he had never enough considered the singular contradiction of horror and forbearance with which she regarded the detestable Cheek. He had been trusted by her father beyond all limit, and what could be more likely than his possession, or alleged possession, of

some ruinous secret, which caused Sir Harry's long silence and self-banishment ? He no sooner thought of this than he became sure of it, and resolved never more to seem conscious of any reserve.

All this passed in his mind during the rapid and exciting changes of conversation, in which each endeavoured to appear wholly engaged, from the perils and atrocities and heaven-sent protection of last night, the endless gratitude, the appalling terrors of the storm and probable fate of the vessels, to thankfulness that the Vicar had slept through the whole of the commotion, and knew nothing about it. And then the old man walked in, always better and better, and radiant with the news of his visitor, to whom he gave a welcome almost intelligible. He was full of glee when he understood that he was likely to have such company for some days, and expressed himself highly gratified to have been thought worthy of so long a ride. He would endeavour to deserve it by acting as guide to all the beauties of the neighbourhood, which he only happened to forget he had never seen himself. At least, this was what he was supposed to say, though a strict adherence to truth obliges us to confess it might have been something else. If, however, there could have been any doubt of what he said, there could have been none at all about what he did, for he set an example at the breakfast-table which was worthy of being better followed.

Several days passed without tidings of the missing boats, and Crowley and Lucy spent them con-

stantly together in attendance upon the Vicar, who had become sharp enough to feel himself a sleeping partner on both sides, and always dozed most profoundly when he was wide awake. But he dozed to no purpose; for, though the restraint of Lucy was ever struggling with a burning desire to be thrown off, and tortured every smile into an expression of pain, it brought about no explanation, and the restless attempts of Crowley to advance without it were so cautiously discouraged that he was driven to new doubts as bad as the old ones. He doubted whether his vanity had not tempted him to a total misconstruction of Lucy's manner, and assigned to mere gratitude every word and look that had seemed to signify a feeling far different. It is hard to maintain the same spirit under such altered conclusions; but, though she never observed the effort without an almost breathless hesitation, the caution was still continued and so was the impression.

But as the days advanced her depression became more apparent, and the never-tiring renewal of Crowley's claims upon a heart which she was now conscious had been his from the first hours of their acquaintance was too strong for her resolution. It had been overstrained, and at last a passing remark of the Vicar, as he left them for his afternoon sleep, that but for Crowley he should have long since been taking his final one, snapped it at once.

"I know not," she said, walking up to him without daring to think of what she did, and placing

for my comprehension *then*, as for after years, when he might no longer be alive to instruct me in things most important for my knowledge."

"It was from Sir Harry, then, that you gained this information of Downton's bond? Has it never been mentioned by your uncle?"

"Never, that I recollect. I was too young till he became insensible of such subjects."

"And never by Cheek?"

"Never. I have mentioned it to him, but he professed never to have heard of it."

"I thought so," replied Crowley, with some sudden conviction. "Go on. The bond was destroyed, you say."

"It was a fatal mistake. Downton's game of chance was afterwards successful. My father says he took to a safer mode of gambling, and availed himself of his large and reckless connection to make bets for others. Betting by commission, I think, he calls it—where the loss fell upon his employers, and the profit on himself. In this shift his rise was rapid, and very soon he became a man of fortune. Secure in his speculations, it rose from large to greater, till it was in his power to pay back all his plunder."

"Had your father no hold upon him but his honour?"

"He wrote to remind him of the past, and his penitential bond; but the penitence, if it ever existed, was not proof against the prosperity. His answer was such as no human spirit could have

borne. A cold, insulting regret that my father was in difficulties; sorrow that he could not assist him; no recollection of the bond he mentioned. Alas, it never was found!"

"Go on. What did your father?"

"Hush!—I am coming to what I would to heaven you had known before you ever saw me; I should not now have asked myself the bitter question of why I did not tell you this before, when it would have fallen upon you less heavily! I cannot answer. You must be generous and forgive!—What follows is from the information of Cheek, now three years ago, for a purpose which I will afterwards explain. It was a tale surpassing human invention. No sooner was Downton's letter received, than my father, incensed beyond endurance, dispatched an answer with the too usual alternative of wrongs and insults which have no other. At the same time he wrote to Cheek to meet him at Dover on a day appointed. He was, I doubt not, punctual. I know it, for my last letter from him told me he hoped to see me on a day which, by comparison of dates, proved to be the day after his intended passage to Dover. He was coming, he said, to resume the care of me,—to take me abroad with him. It was rapture to my childish heart. It was the last throb of happiness I was ever destined to feel. He was at Dover, then, on that night: a dark and stormy one, befitting the work in hand. Downton was there likewise; but the wretch came for other purpose than that for which he was defied.

He never mentioned it to a soul. He was ashamed at evading it, and seized the opportunity of selling his expected victim to some of those creditors whose claims had not been provided for. It was proved, by their own evidence, that he took them down with officers to arrest him!"

We will not give Crowley's exclamations; few could have been strong enough.

"It was past midnight when Cheek, as he told me, arrived by a public conveyance at the Dover Hotel. He enquired whether there had been any arrival from Boulogne, but could not learn. He then asked for Downton, and found he was there, but had walked out an hour or two before. The people were wondering what kept him out so late in such a tempest. It was the spirit of the vulture looking out for his prey, and fearful that the waves might rob him of it. So unusual a circumstance at length created uneasiness, and searchers were sent out. And now prepare for my last secret. Downton was found upon the beach."

"And what had kept him?"

"He was dead! He had been *murdered*."

"Instead of hanged! Most miserable pity! His fortune was too good!"

"*Murdered!*" she repeated, in a low convulsive gasp. "Murdered!—by whom?"

Crowley started back in horror. "You doubt your *father*?"

"No! I appeal to all that is sacred!" she almost shrieked. "I pawn my soul the hand was not his!"

But what would *others* say? So wronged—so ruined—so desolate—so driven to utter madness! My mother broken hearted and dead—himself an outlaw—defied and sold by a coward traitor! Pierced by every sting that man can feel! Where's he that could have held his hand? And yet it was *not* his! No! on my soul of souls! But what would be the world's judgment on his honour? What would be the sentence on his life, if he yet lives? Fly me! Let me die!"

She would have fallen out of the boat—if he had not caught her in his arms, and held her till the burst of agony died away in exhaustion. She then resumed in accents more faint and piteous.

"Forgive me. I try your forbearance too much. But I have been tried myself so long with the sight of my father's honour and his life at the mercy of his wicked agent that you must needs be compassionate! If his word were all I have to dread, I should not fear it; but the many things that crowd to its confirmation. The intolerable provocations! The challenge! The death on the same day! What innocence could hope to clear itself?"

"Lucy," exclaimed Crowley, arresting an impetuous outbreak at the malignant influence of Cheek. "This is a matter to be viewed rationally. In the first place, Sir Harry was known too long and loved too well to be so assailable. Midnight on a dark and stormy coast, frequented by the lowest and most reckless from all nations, can well account for the crime without fixing it where it is impossible.

Murder is the most probable consequence we could look for to a person so exposed. But tell me, if you can, what was the manner of this murder."

" He was shot."

" Were there any signs of contention ?"

" None."

" Was there no robbery ?"

" None."

" Were none of his racing friends at Dover ?"

" It was enquired into, but none were discovered."

" Was Sir Harry's name mentioned ?"

" No ; nobody had seen him but Cheek."

" That is impossible, if he was there at all. He must have been seen by the boatmen who brought him, and the servants of the hotel where he lodged. Had Cheek been on the beach after Downton went out ?"

" He proved that he had not left the house."

" You say you have an explanation to give of his reasons for telling you these things, three years ago."

" It was to hold me in his power ; to compel me to silence wherever he could take courage to insult me, and was never mentioned till he knew my uncle's mind had become too feeble to interfere."

" I was right, on my life ! I see the whole history ! That bond is still in existence ! Cheek knows it, and so does Cox ; else wherefore was the bribe for family papers, and why was Cheek's denial but that both villains knew your inheritance to them ? These letters are the gift of Providence, and I must

see them ! But of your father first. Are not these hints of horrors more damning to Cheek than all those provocations to your father ? Are they not invented for ends of his own, and does he not know they may be demolished by a breath ? Why else has he quailed under your scorn ? Why but because he knows Sir Harry was not in England when this crime was committed ? Had he been seen, would he not have been the first person suspected ? and were there no eyes to see him but Cheek's ? But what if you had driven him to publish this tale, with the fact that you had known it for three years ? What would then have been established but that you believed and shunned it ? What would have been the consequence but to make you the chief accuser ? What could have been more fatal ? Should he ever dare so far, the longer the delay the more certain the inference. Denounce him, and the world is convinced ; tremble, and it more than doubts. Had I but known this when I had the scoundrel by the throat ! But we'll find better means. We must leave this place to-morrow. We cannot wait another day for the boats, for which we can leave instructions. Our first step is to Lady Goldfield, with whom I must leave you whilst I again take counsel in London."

The decision with which he spoke was precisely what Lucy required to awaken her natural spirit. It had been lulled with too much craft, in the days of girlish docility, to look upon her position, when better qualified, with what painters call a fresh eye ;

otherwise the glaring truths now forced upon her must have occurred to herself. She was, at first, stupefied, like some captive emerging from a dungeon to daylight, but a moment transformed her into another creature, and her sudden convictions poured in too rapidly for utterance.

The passionate transitions from opposite extremes of feeling are more interesting to the actors than the readers of them, and we may sum up the many words of transport, the scarcely coherent self-reproaches for blindness and doubt, and years of hesitation and shame, in the one intelligible sentence that she placed the fame, perhaps the life, of her father in the hands of Crowley ; and, from the day he should prove them unsullied, whatever else his heart might desire.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Vicar has, through a large portion of this history, represented a dead weight employed to keep others in the ascendant, or rather the main-spring of our watch, which only marks the passing hours by the hands it moves ; but his action must now begin to be more apparent. He was, as we have said from the first, a good and generous man, though it was not till the evening in which we have been engaged that we found the first proof of it. He was then in a fair train of thinking for himself, and earnestly occupied in the study of how he might best repay Lucy's devoted care of him and ensure her happiness. Of the attachment which had grown up under his eyes he had always been dreamily aware, but he had only lately been in a state to consider it seriously, with a view to her future protection. It was now the cause of much perplexity from her evident reluctance to favour Crowley's advances, while it was equally evident that the resistance was against her inclination ; and it seemed to him, from the absence of all suspicion

of the true cause, that he must himself be their obstacle. She might be unwilling to leave him to the sole care of Mrs. Bloomer, and no less so to inflict the charge of his age and infirmities upon a husband.

Whilst he was thus ruminating, the little boat leaped home before a fitful breeze, like the laughter of a few early stars that winked through the dappled blue, and the voyagers came in with no more alarming event than the loss of a heavy freight of care. In Lucy indeed there was still some trace of the shower that had passed away, and the Vicar was quite able to perceive it, but he made no remark, as he felt it lay entirely in his power to prevent such showers in future. He was more lively than usual, and spared no effort to prove that he was more himself than they had dared to hope, by which he dispelled much apprehension for the effect of their projected disclosure. A very few words made it unavoidable; for having approached some of those allusions which are seldom directed towards young people, except when their mutual understanding is declared, and found that they caused no confusion, he ventured a step farther and remarked that now they had done him so much benefit it was time to think of some benefit for themselves.

“ What benefit can I wish for, uncle, beyond that of seeing you perfectly restored ? ”

“ But, now that is accomplished, my dear, what next ? ”

“ What but to watch and keep you so ?”

“ I am afraid it would be too selfish to allow that.
What says Mr. Crowley ?”

“ Always, my dear sir, the same as Miss Long-
land.”

“ I understand you ; and not now for the first time. I fear that a consideration for me is standing in the way of other considerations of much more moment, and that must not be. Many golden hours have been squandered upon an old man who has not been worth them, and may live long enough to exhaust the treasury. If you would not undo your own good work you must cease to perplex any projects of your own with a question of what is to become of me. That point is settled, for I am now well enough to be trusted to myself.”

“ Uncle !” cried Lucy. “ What can you mean ?”

“ Only, my child, to think of home.”

“ Home ! at the vicarage ?”

“ No ; that I must leave to the enjoyment of Mrs. Bloomer. It would be too great a trial of her patience to endure such discrepancies of taste ; nor can I think of providing any better residence for her. An exodus from her paradise of duck-ponds would fall upon me more reproachfully than the recollection of having brought her to it. My home is here. This little fishing village, in which we have passed our time so happily, suits me exactly. Here is all that I shall ever want. Tranquillity and the chance of still doing some good ; two rooms, which are all I should inhabit if I possessed a palace, and

a kind and watchful nurse, which is all the attendance I should require if my household consisted of a legion."

Lucy was again in tears, and Crowley hastened to stop them.

"My dear sir," he said, "you do not know that by this plan you entirely destroy all those we have been building. If fate should be disposed to bless me with Lucy, she will tell you it can only be on condition that you consent to be our mutual care."

The Vicar was bewildered.

"I should have been a bar to most people; but, if not to you, what other bar can there be?"

They looked anxiously at each other, but neither of them answered; and the poor old man inquired again.

"Oh, uncle! do not agitate yourself, and we will tell you."

"It cannot be postponed," said Crowley. "Leave it to me. You have already told the tale once, and must not speak another word."

He then related every particular of Lucy's griefs since the time at which her uncle became incapable of understanding them; and though it was not possible to spare him great varieties of excitement, the task was performed without more damage than a strong desire to discuss the point with Mr. Cheek in a manner highly unclerical. But it was not the mere dotard's anger that towers for want of ballast, for it showed that though his intellect had been

long dormant it was very far from gone. It roused up his habitual indolence to the sharpness of an Old Bailey lawyer, and he took the incredible case to pieces and showed its utter impossibility, maintaining that nothing was wanting but his own lost memory which he would tear from his head though his brains came with it. Had he ever heard of a murder ? He could not remember ; but a doubt of Sir Harry must have been indelible. It must have been burnt into him. Had Cheek a doubt ? If he had, why tell it to a child, and not to him ? Twelve years ago he was not what Cheek and Mrs. Bloomer had made him since ; what reason then for silence, except that he feared detection ? He should reach him through his own letters. He had scores from him when he professed to be absent on Sir Harry's affairs ; all of them complaining that he had never seen him since he first left England. He had them all at the Vicarage. He had never destroyed one of them ; and as to Boulogne—he had once a friend who did duty there. What was his name ? He might have known Sir Harry, and might help to confute the lie. There must be his letters amongst the rest. All were at the Vicarage. He would be there to-morrow, and at Boulogne the next day.

“ I will go to the Vicarage for you, sir, and bring you every scrap of paper in the house. Mrs. Bloomer may be too much for you. Goldsworthy will be quite near enough.”

“ Goldsworthy then, by daylight ! This is my own doing, my own evil habits, my own imbecility,

but the light shall flare up yet before it dies, though it consume the last ember!"

When he was sufficiently pacified, Mrs. Whilck was called up to hear the sudden arrangement, and be consoled by the assurance that the departure was only on business material to her dear young lady, and that the dear old gentleman meant to make his home with her, and that none of them would ever lose sight of her. The good woman had no leisure for regret, and went off happily to secure a conveyance for the next morning.

On leaving the cottage for the night, Crowley walked along the high bank of sand and shingle that sheltered the one-sided village, to find his groom and give directions. Having done this, he was about to seek his lodgings.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the groom, "but don't you remember that the first day we came to Broome Warren you drove over to Oakendell?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"And we did not know the way, and you stopped to ask one of the village girls, and gave her money to buy a pair of shoes?"

"Yes, I remember. What of it?"

"She arrived here, sir, not half an hour ago, with a little boy who used to mind Mrs. Bloomer's ducks, both terribly tired."

"Where is she? That must be the girl they call Nelly."

"She said that was her name, sir, but I can't tell what has become of her, for whilst I was gone to

get them something to eat, they disappeared. She told me she had something most particular to say to you and Miss Longland, and asked in great trouble whether the young lady was safe."

"Find her as fast as you can. I will wait hereabouts."

He sat down upon an upturned boat, in great wonder at what Nelly could want with him, but for some time received no tidings. It was a fine but stirring night, indicating more wind beyond the rocks than was felt within them, and changing rapidly from light to dark. As he watched the singular effect of the shadows which seemed to run about in chase of each other, he was startled by a sudden outcry of rough voices at some distance on the sea. It was a violent altercation, and lasted several minutes, and then there was a long red flash through the darkness, and a thundering report."

"The 'Cockle Shell' at last!" he exclaimed, "and the cutter too!"

It was long before anything was visible, but at last, by straining his eyes upon a gleam of moonlight through a fissure of the cliffs, he perceived a dark speck crossing it. Presently it appeared again, coming straight to land, and then it was lost again. It could not be a bird, as he first supposed, because a bird would have taken wing, and it did not swim like one, though apparently quite as well. A very little time would decide, for, along the margin of the sea there were some thirty or forty yards of moonshine, as if the jagged shadows were a half-

raised portcullis. The object passed under this, and he became convinced it was a human being.

“Upon my word,” he thought, “that fellow has had a pretty good swim, and must have had pretty good cause for it!” with which he hastened towards the landing to see what was the matter. But before he arrived a boat, which had been following the swimmer under the deep gloom, darted like a black monster behind him, and the moment he gained footing, two or three evil geniuses plunged upon him, and extracted just that sort of roar which might have been expected from some astonished victim on his way down the throat of the sea-serpent. A larger boat was behind, with several more people, and some one superior, who jumped ashore just as Crowley gained the spot. It turned out to be the long missing and very anxiously expected lieutenant. Nothing could have been less looked for, or better timed, or hailed with a more hearty welcome.

“I’m afraid,” said the sailor, “I have caused some alarm, but your friends, Cox and the Commodore, are quite safe, and very much improved. Here’s one who has had the good luck to be sober for ten days, and there’s the other in the boat, with all the benefits of sea-fare and salt water. I am just going to stretch their legs by a march to Lymp-ton.”

The rest of the story was much as Mrs. Whilk had imagined. On the night when the prisoners were pulled off to the ‘Kittywake,’ the ‘Cockle

Shell' was just discernible under full sail in the distance, the crew having a reasonable notion that as their commander did not come on board with his prize, he must have altered his arrangements, and remained a prize himself. The most prudent line, therefore, for those who had other views, was a direct line to any port on the opposite coast.

"I could not catch the rogues," continued the young officer, "but I knew that as soon as I got out of the way they would come back to fish up the tubs they sunk the night before, and so I took a good stretch in the wrong direction, and a run back in the right one after dark to look out from a cove not far off. As they saw nothing of me, out they came at last, and I've just rounded yonder point and pounced upon them, tubs and all, and Captain Bunckle into the bargain, as you see, for the little rascal repaid me for releasing his hands by jumping overboard. The other captain would, no doubt, have done the same, if his friends the dukes and marquises had ever taught him to swim. Come, my men, now the Commodore has had his washing on with his Darbies again!"

The operation was a trying conclusion to the disastrous tale, and, as Mr. Bunckle had no more hope of escaping on the honourable track, his half drowning seemed the only prevention to his total conflagration.

"Look here!" he yelled, holding up his handcuffs. "Look how the king and constitution encourage the navy! Look at the thieves who skulk under cover,

for fear my boys should sink 'em with a pocket-pistol! Thieves who've been thieves ever since I can remember, and stole every keg of brandy that ever crossed the sea, unless they went halves! All I have in the world purloined for king and constitution, and not a blessed hope left except that king and constitution may drink every drop of it, a tub at a go! Look at my poor 'Cockle Shell,' with a hole punched through her stern by a cannon ball, and made a cripple for the rest of her days! Look at me, as was obliged to swim for my life to pay what they call their duty! and look at the reward on my wrists! Ruined from stem to stern, and nothing left but to cut my throat, and let the government go to —— for it!" and hereupon his eloquence was choked by a guttural convulsion.

But the scene was to have another, and a really touching, turn in the hurried arrival of poor Nelly and little Tom, who had been roused up from the shelter of a boat under which they had curled their weary limbs for a homeless repose. They knew their father's voice, and flitted forward with a cry as wild as the clamour of the birds overhead, and the cry was instinctively known by the luckless man, who clasped his iron hands over his eyes, as if ashamed to behold them.

"Father, father!" screamed the poor, tattered girl, flinging her streaming locks upon his neck.

"Daddy, daddy!" shouted the boy, who, overcome by toil, could only roll at his feet.

"Nelly! my little Tom!" gasped Bunckle, now

really overwhelmed. "What brought you here ? Where do you come from ?"

But Nelly had distinguished Crowley, and cried beseechingly : "Oh, sir ! I know you ! You are Mr. Crowley and I am poor Nelly, and I have done my very best to serve you and one that you love better. You will not—I know you will not—be hard upon my father!"

"Why should you fear it, my good Nelly ? It cannot be in *me* that you look for an enemy !"

"*You are* my enemy !" bellowed the Commodore ; "you know you are. All you justices are my enemies, and have been, ever since I was born ! Haven't you just took the bread out of the mouths of these poor children, who are starving and almost dead ?"

"No !" exclaimed Nelly ; "no. Mr. Crowley never took the bread from a living creature."

"No, that a didn't !" cried Tom. "Many's the shillin' he's giv me when I minded Mother Bloomer's ducks, and hadn't a morsel of wittles ! And he'll help dad ! I knows a will."

"I will, my boy, as far as I am able. Nelly, I know all that you have done. Only tell me why you are here."

"Partly, sir, to warn Miss Longland of Captain Cox's intentions, which I only heard last night, and partly to save my father from a crime in which, I bless God ! he has failed ; partly, also, a timely word for *you* ; for I have been to Oakendell, where they told me you were here."

Here it was again necessary to quiet the Commodore.

“Have no fears for your children, Mr. Bunckle, for I will take care of them myself.”

Bunckle stared and hardly comprehended.

“I give you my promise I will show them every kindness I can.”

“No? Will you, though?” And he drew his hand across his eyes with a roughness that might have wiped them out.

“I will call up Mrs. Whilk, and have them put to bed comfortably, with a good supper and every possible care.”

“Will you though?” And he made a strong effort to restrain the rage that mingled with his better feelings. “Thank ‘e; you ain’t so bad as I thought ye.”

Perhaps Mr. Bunckle also was not quite so bad as we have thought him, though his goodness was of that modest kind which shuns display. There was a soft place somewhere or other—a family secret—not quite impervious to conscience or consolation, which he bore with a dogged sort of patience, though poor Nelly’s comforting could only remind him of the salutary effects of a spell in prison, where there were no kegs; and Mr. Dabchick said that everybody came out a gallus deal happier than they went in.

If he might scarcely have been persuaded to look upon these benefits with exceeding pleasure, Crowley mended the matter by a hint that better courses would make it the duty of those who had the power

to help him on, which they would much rather do than send him to gaol. A few words of this kind very much improved his spirits; and, when the officer thought it time to order him away to be dried up by the alehouse fire, he went so far as to finish off a rude blessing on his children with a grumbling “good-night” to the justice.

As soon as he was in marching order, his fellows in affliction were hauled out of the larger boat and marched after him—Captain Cox, of course, the most conspicuous from his still jaunty and consequential look, haggard and squalid though it was, upon a ten-days’ dietary of salt pork and bilge-water. The lieutenant took a friendly farewell; and, with the understanding that Crowley would be at Lympton in the morning, returned to prepare the “Kittywake” and the prize for a squally night.

“And now, my good Nelly,” said Crowley, “what is your timely word for me?”

She looked cautiously at her brother, who had again fallen asleep, and then said impressively, “It is to beware, sir, of Aaron.”

“Of Aaron? And wherefore?”

“He is a desperate man, sir, and has had wrongs enough to make him so. But I am sure you will not harm him if you can help it, for it is from him I come to warn Miss Lucy of her danger.”

“Why did he not warn *me*, that night he was taken?”

“He says he did, sir; and that you would not

hear him, but bound him for his good intentions, and sent him to gaol."

"But what of the letters—his silence about Cox—his refusal to give his name?"

"Oh, sir, he was ashamed of it. They had transported him, though he was innocent. He was returning from Sea Cliff, where he had been to find me news of my father, when he met Captain Cox and engaged in his service to save Miss Lucy and repay his great wrongs. He says that you wronged him worse. He was almost mad before, and that made him quite so. He depended on making his escape and doing all with his own hands, and it was only when he found this impossible, that he sent for me. Be careful, sir, for he is not himself. But would he have sent me here if he had not been faithful to Miss Lucy, whom he had nursed as a child and never could forget?"

"You are a good pleader, my poor Nelly, and may be sure that, if I have done him wrong, I will do him right. Come with me to Miss Longland, and tell me more. I will see him to-morrow; but, in the meantime, did he say nothing else? Nothing of Sir Harry Longland?"

"He said he had something extraordinary which he had promised to Miss Lucy; but, before I could ask him what it was, they told me it was time to go, and turned me out."

There was something in this relation, coming at such a moment, which seemed an intervention of more than accident; but Nelly was too much ex-

hausted to be farther questioned. "Come, Nelly, come ; I forgot your pitiable state. Do not wake your little brother. It is not far to carry so light a burthen." And he gently took him up in his arms.

"*You, Mr. Crowley ! you* carry my poor little dirty brother!"

"Yes, Nelly, and your own fortune, likewise. Depend on that."

CHAPTER XV.

THE one vehicle of Sea Cliff which had brought Lucy and the Vicar was ready to take them back again at the hour appointed, accompanied by Crowley on horseback ; and they were soon out of hearing of the grateful good wishes that followed them in their four or five hours of speculation upon Aaron Daunt ; for the direct road to Lympton had no advantage by the railway, which is crossed at right angles.

Lympton was a picturesque and rather considerable town, built on a rising ground with many undulations, and showing its most substantial features to the best advantage. The principal of these was a venerable monastic looking mass, which, at the moment of our passing, was the only object in shadow, and, as it could not be a monastery, needed small ingenuity to suggest the nearest approach to it. It rose, as if its neighbourhood were not popular, at the farther outskirt, more lofty than anything else, and was in fact the prison. Beyond it was a sunny blue distance, forest without end, and at the

base of its steep foundation wound the same river which flowed through Goldsworthy Park ; rather too close, we should have said, for it seemed to undermine it. The scene was said to be so lovely from the top of the tower that anyone, whose business was not of an expiatory nature, might have thought a journey thither well worth the trouble ; and to the honour of the county, we may affirm that there was very seldom a natural dissentient. Still the admiration of such a view could scarcely be indulged without some feeling that it was seen from a spot where less eager visitors sometimes only went to take leave of it.

Lucy and Crowley were probably too busy with their own thoughts for such reflections, and the Vicar observed nothing, for during the whole drive he had been absorbed in puzzling out everything that could bear upon the revelations of the last evening, though apparently with not much success. A great deal seemed to sit, as it were, upon the brink of his memory, but nothing could be enticed in.

They were soon comfortably established at the hotel, where it was settled for Crowley to go alone, in the first instance, to prepare Aaron for an interview with Lucy. A climb up the street brought him to Gallows Hill, at the top of which rose the grim walls of the jail, where he presented his card for the governor, and was of course admitted. But the malefactors from Sea Cliff having only just arrived, and some preliminaries being necessary

before they were turned into their dismal quadrangle, with the exception of Cox who had petitioned for a previous conference, he was requested to wait a few minutes. During these, Aaron was surprised by the entrance of his foot-sore and crest-fallen friend, the Commodore.

It was a meeting more pleasant on one side than the other, for Aaron triumphed in the news that Cox's plans had been defeated, though the triumph was not of long duration. Whilst the jailers were engaged in relieving the revenue guard of their charge, and receiving directions for the lodgment of so many recruits, there was time enough for him to hear all that had taken place at Sea Cliff with great minuteness; for Mr. Bunckle's memory of that evening was sparkling to a degree that lighted up every smouldering coal in his breast. Lucy had been taught to repay his care for her by a belief in his utter villainy, and Cox had been snatched from his personal vengeance by the hands of the law; for both of which he was indebted to Crowley, in addition to his own unmerited usage. It was a bad preface to a satisfactory meeting between them, and was wound up by a message that Mr. Crowley desired to see him.

The interview took place in the room allotted to such occasions, and was without witnesses, about which a visitor less confident than Crowley might, after Nelly's warning, have thought twice. Aaron entered with his large limbs clothed in the prison dress; his raven hair cropped short and bristly;

and the glare which was natural to him most appropriate to a dark night on Bagshot Heath. His manner was something so mixed between mock respect and real defiance that even Crowley thought it best to continue standing and to keep a vigilant eye. He addressed him, however, in a calm and kind voice, stating that he had received information about him which had caused much regret for his committal to that prison, and a hope, with some assistance from himself, to procure his immediate discharge.

The intelligence caused no visible change of countenance, unless it was a deeper shadow.

"The information, sir," he replied steadily, and with a look as fixed as Crowley's, "came, I presume, from a young woman lately in the service of Mr. Cheek. I am much obliged to her, but I have no wish to avail myself of it. To have been here for an hour makes it quite indifferent if I remain for a twelve month; and I am better content to wait than to trouble gentlemen for favours."

The answer was not promising.

"I am sorry," said Crowley, "to see such strong feeling for the consequences of a charge which you might yourself have averted by a single word."

"I'm aware of it, sir; but not of your authority to question a man who was doing no wrong. It is hard to remember what are the laws of this country after being sent away to forget them in a far distant one for many years of misery and shame."

"There is much in what you say ; and your case deserves the more consideration from the lamentable fact, which I have recently learnt, that your first and heavy sentence was no better founded than the comparatively slight mistake which has followed."

"A slight mistake, sir ? You would not think it a slight one, I believe, to be dressed in these clothes and have your head trimmed by the hangman ! But I am not gifted with words, and those who have been made savages can be but rough reasoners. Perhaps you will be good enough to come more directly to the particular circumstance which has made me the object of your favour."

"I think I understand you ; but do not mislead yourself with the idea that I have come here to propose a price for justice. *That*, as far as I am able, will be done independently of all other considerations."

"You are very good, sir ; but I care little for the justice that brings no remedy. If it is the same to you we may better understand each other by plain speaking. Miss Longland has, no doubt, informed you that I am likely to possess some knowledge of importance to her and the name she bears, and perhaps they may be of importance to you likewise. My former master, Mr. Downton, died a mysterious death, of which the perpetrator was never discovered, and she has a terrible suspicion of some one very near to her."

"You are wrong. The reputation of Sir Harry Longland is beyond suspicion."

"I am glad to hear it, sir. It saves you the necessity of applying to me."

"You are wrong again. The hideous calumny must bring its retribution upon the inventor."

"Well, sir, I wish you success."

Such cool defiance was hard to be endured, but Crowley had too much at stake to lose it by imprudence; and he tried, with a forced calmness, every means by which an obdurate spirit might be brought to reason; representing Aaron's great claim to amends for all that might be proved unfounded, and the complicity of all who maintained a guilty secret. He reminded him of his night conversation with Lucy, her faith in his promise, his professed sympathy and gratitude for former kindness, and his warning against Cheek, whom he now sheltered at the expense of his own conscience.

Aaron listened with a defiant smile, which showed that every argument was hopeless, and answered the question of whether anything with the feelings of a man could resist such demands upon him, with the unperturbed observation that, though he was a man once, the return which men had made him had converted him to something else; that he had ceased to belong to that fraternity, and had found what was more worthy amongst the beasts of the desert. As for rewards, he was as far beyond them as the stars which, for

years, had been his only companions ; and caring for nobody and nothing in the world, he was the most independent thing in it—human or otherwise.

“ Is that an answer, sir ? ”

“ No ; it is the raving of a madman, and you will yourself be the first to thank me for not hearing it. If you were in your senses, it would only appear that you have pretended to information which you do not possess, and disgraced a really manly character, of which I have seen evidence, by falsehood which you are ashamed to confess. I think better of you, and will see you again when you have had time to think better of yourself.”

“ I am quite as capable of thinking now, sir, as those who sent me here ; for the madman reminds the justice how the highest tuned strings are the easiest broken, and so it is with the highest natures of men. I have been transported, and am now in durance, and both times for the lowest of crimes : too low for any to rise from but the dead. Let those who are careless of their condemnations care more for the consequences. Laws wrongfully applied make good men what you see me. Tell that to your judges and juries, your blundering magistrates, dishonest masters and wrong-headed squires, and let them preach to their victims when they have amended themselves. There’s scripture for that if they would but study it.”

“ What think you, then, with such good reason-

ing, of your refusal to be just in the case we speak of ? Does it deserve less consideration than your own ? And does not your own argument make you as guilty as those you condemn ?"

"I but return, sir, what I have received. That which people have believed me they must look to find me. There was a time"—and his memory seemed travelling far back—"there was a time when Sir Harry Longland's was a happy home,—when my heaviest duty was hunting butterflies and weaving daisy chains for a nursery. I was the foremost workman, and a favourite beyond the rest, and nothing was well done but what was done by Aaron Daunt. Well, sir, times changed, and I was sent forth degraded to the world's extremity, with not a just or charitable thought to follow me, except perhaps some thought that might dwell in the memory of childhood. It was the only spark of hope they left me. Fetters and dungeons have produced strange fancies. Trifles have become treasures, and now the last is gone; and for so much favour I am bound to this much service. Do you expect it, sir? or must I give another reason why you need not?"

"Aaron," replied Crowley, with a last effort to be patient, "there's that about you which has much inclined me to pity; but more, at each word you speak, to an impression more dangerous."

"Indulge it as you please, sir. My reason for denying this service is that the benefit would be

shared by you. Have you done with me now?"

"Not till I have proved you far worse than I first believed you. You were Downton's servant,—you were at Dover on the night of his murder,—you were afterwards the servant of this Cox, who derived the profit, and were, I believe, sent out of the country from dread of your detection and his own. You prove yourself a savage more by nature than by hardship, and who so likely to have done what you have hinted against Cheek, your probable accomplice, at whose cost you have been feeling your way to what doubts may have been entertained of yourself? With three of you, each shaking at the other two, you will be shaken clean enough. I have done with you."

And he called to the jailor.

The jailor entered, and conducted Aaron, whose look was more savage than his tongue, back to the prison yard; and Crowley returned to the hotel.

In the prison yard Aaron's untameable spirit was still more developed. Cox's business with the governor having proved to be nothing but a negotiation for better quarters than his fellows, on the ground of his better means of paying for them, and his great intimacy with Lord Charles and the Duke, was, of course, not listened to, and he was driven into the quadrangle, hanging back like a thief from the whipping-post, and noisy enough to

do honour to it. Here was usage for a gentleman, because he had been robbed by a rascal who had been there a hundred times ! Here was the return for taking back and forgiving a transported servant, who laid his own villainies at the door of his master ! Here was encouragement for thinking too charitably, and trusting to the force of good example ; and a great deal more of that style of eloquence by which gentlemen in like circumstances usually convince themselves ; while the rest of the rogues hurrahed for a gentleman, and pranced about their new comrade with shouts of merriment.

In his gyrations from one compliment to another, he had the bad luck to come against his late familiars, who seemed standing in ambush for their turn.

“ You ! ” was his greeting, presuming on the protection of numbers. “ See what you have brought me to ! ”

“ You ! ” retorted Aaron. “ See what you have brought *me* to ! ”

“ By all that’s good you have got me into prison ! ”

“ And by all that’s bad,” was the answer, “ I will get you out if the walls are not too high ! ”

Wherewith he seized his late master, who had scarce nerve for a struggle, and hurled him high upon his journey, dashing him against the rough masonry with a force that went far to settle all debts at once. He fell, to all appearance, dead, and immediately the other prisoners, who danger-

ously outnumbered the jailors, set up a deafening tumult.

For a time there was great fear of a general escape, for which Aaron fought with all his might, and was desperately seconded; but in the end, a heavy bar from the door to the cells levelled the leader as senseless as Captain Cox, and then the followers lost heart, and, of course, had only been trying to secure him. Just then the governor, alarmed by the riot, hurried in to learn the cause, and ordered the chief offender, and the Commodore, who was supposed to have set him on, to the strongest hold in the jail. They were instantly carried off; and then Cox, who began to show signs of life, was gathered up, and humanely conveyed to the comfortable lodging which had been denied to the influence of his noble friends. So far he was fortunate, for, but for his bruises, his first night under lock and key would have been some improvement on those he had lately passed; but perhaps it may be too soon to congratulate him.

The confinement to which Aaron and Bunckle were carried was on the steep side of the prison over the river which flowed some forty feet beneath their iron grating, and might be almost as many yards broad. It was not near dark when they took up their residence; and, when Aaron was sufficiently recovered, the pair were left to themselves. The first thing they did was to stare through their bars and study their prospects of escape, for neither

of them desired to await the inquiry which was sure to take place before the visiting magistrate the next day. The Commodore, in particular, had heard of a piece of apparatus called the triangle, sometimes resorted to in extreme cases, and the thought of it was enough to suggest a leap from the grated chink, if he could only get his proportions through. Aaron was more eager still, though from motives of a less personal nature; for, quite beside himself from the effects of wrong and rage, and the feeling that Crowley had brought him to his new degradation, with the menace of a change far worse and equally false, he was wholly possessed by another fell resolution, to take what he considered justice into his own hands. But how to compass the means was beyond all strain of invention.

After writhing through another hour or two, they heard a jailor at the hole over their door, with the crust and pitcher for their supper, and Bunckle, having an extensive acquaintance amongst the staff from his many visits, inquired which of them it was.

“ Which ?” replied a surly voice. “ Why me.”

“ Bolt ! Glad to see you, Bolt. How have you been this long time ?”

“ Why, better than you’ll be by this time tomorrow, or else I’m no judge. Why couldn’t you hold your bobbery, and save your jackets ? It’s a pleasure to lock up them that’s agreeable ; but when they make us carry them to their quarters, I wish they’d go farther and fare worse.”

"Very true, Bolt; and, odd enough, that's exactly what we want to do, because we cannot a-bear to give trouble. How's Cox?"

"How? Why, dead to be sure."

"Dead! You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do," replied Mr. Bolt, as if Bunckle's petrifaction gave him a peculiar sort of pleasure.

"What, dead?"

"Aye, dead! as we say of a rat, when he has had just such another shaking."

"Lord, what'll become of Aaron?"

"Yes, and you too; for you're both in for it."

"Me! How can that be?"

"Oh! only because you are; so you had better make up your mind to it, for I tell 'e how it 'll be. First of all, five or six dozen for the row. That's for breakfast to-morrow."

"What, the cat?"

"In course, and she scratches pretty deep. There's a couple of new ones ordered, and a brass band, because we always sing to music in these parts. So get your voice in order. Don't be down-hearted. A little salt and water will get you a new skin before the 'sizes; and then, you know, the hanging will make you forget all about it."

What further consolations Mr. Bolt may have had in store we cannot say, for they met with a sudden interruption. He had not been able to see how they soothed the nerves of his other prisoner;

and to satisfy his friendly concern on this point, he projected his head a little farther through his hole of observation. The opportunity had been carefully watched for, and was not lost; for, quick as the dart of a rattle-snake, the strong hand of Aaron clutched him by the wind-pipe.

"Hold him tight," cried the Commodore. "Hold him tight!"

Mr. Bolt gaped and rolled his eyes, but had no voice in the matter.

"Now," said Aaron, with a scowl of ferocious scorn, "what have you to tell us about your cat and your brass band? Out with your keys, and hand them through the hole here—out with them, or, by all the howlings of by and bye, I'll pull your head off!"

Mr. Bolt felt everywhere for his pockets, but in too great a hurry to find them.

"Gently, Aaron, gently! Be merciful; for if you kill him we shan't get out. Now Bolt, my boy, make haste."

And haste he made, for the key was out of his pocket as if it burnt him, and Bunckle let himself out without discomposing his friend's grip.

"Feel his pockets, Commodore; they always carry handcuffs."

There was no need to feel, for Bolt was in the greatest haste of the three, and helped to handcuff himself round the bars of the opening as if he felt it a great pleasure. When this was accomplished, Aaron told him he was going to let him breathe,

but that if he breathed too loud he must stop his wind.

“There, now tell us the way to get out ; and, if you tell us wrong, say your prayers. Can we get along these passages ?”

Bolt shook his head, and gulped and hiccupped, “Too many doors ; too many warders ; over the roof ; get you a rope.”

“Dare say,” replied Bunckle. “Rope enough. Think of something else, for you had better get rid of us. You must find us something to wrench these window bars. Where’s that great iron that knocked down Aaron ? You brought it up with you, for fear he should want another lick. What did you do with it ?”

The fellow signified by sundry noises that he had left it on the last landing place.

“That ’ll do, Aaron ! Can you swim ?”

“Swim ! Fly !”

“Then don’t kill him till I come back.”

He was away and back again with just the instrument they wanted.

“Now then ; only a jump for it ; and not half so high as the truck of a man-of-war.”

“Never mind how high. Give me that thing, and take a twist of his neck-cloth.”

The great strength of Aaron found the task no difficulty. The grating was rusty and decayed, and a few wrenches snapped it and left a free passage ; but it had now become too dark to see below, and there was an instant of fear for the noise

the weight might make in falling. There was no danger. The river was there to receive it, and all that was heard was a splash that scarcely broke the murmur of the current.

“All safe!” said the Commodore, scrambling up to the chink. “Off with your jacket! Keep your legs straight, and your arms close to your sides. Don’t strike out till you’re in the water, and mind you don’t come on my head. Good-bye, Bolt! Here we go!” And away he flew. Aaron thought he was a long time getting to the bottom, but at last there was a little thud and a faint flash.

“I don’t know whether that’s the water, or whether he has struck fire,” muttered Aaron, as he waited to give his friend time to clear himself away. “Now you, Bolt, bellow till you burst; but, if you are wise, tell them we are both drowned, and it’s of no use to look for us,” and he launched himself in the air to follow the frightful lead. The jailor listened with bristling hair and speechless wonder, till he heard the same dash in the river, and then he set up the alarm in good earnest.

The yells were speedily echoed by the prisoners in the neighbouring cells, and handed on through the whole building in horrible apprehension of fire, or a general tumble down of the old walls. Doors slammed, and officials hallooed and raced about to learn the cause of commotion. Some, more humane or more frightened than the rest, drew the bolts of their ward, that every rogue might take care of himself. One sounded the alarm to summon the town

of Lympton, and another stole the bell-rope, and all got up to the roof to see where the fire was, for Mr. Bolt could only roar and plunge to be untethered. Nobody heeded him, for it is not to be supposed—at least, we never knew an instance—that when people are in a panic they can listen to any one but themselves; and so they continued running against each other, and substituting real for imaginary perils, till, finding no flames breaking out, and no fragments falling in, they all stopped and gaped, and raised another tumult of blessings on everybody's eyes, for terrifying all the world about nothing.

Then began another hallaboloo to secure the prisoners, and some ran down, and some ran up, where they found the last two malefactors fastening an end of their bell-rope to a chimney, to slide down after those they had helped away. It was only not like Bedlam broke loose because the wise folks were gone, and only the mad ones remained.

It was some time before the roused governor could get through his demented garrison, and learn the truth, and then followed a list of the killed, wounded, and missing. Happily there were none in the first column, and only a few contusions in the second, but in the third were nearly all the rank and file, who had excused themselves from the roll-call, and gone off

“With all the world before them, where to choose.”

Captain Cox, with two or three of the less active, was the only exception, for having succeeded in

finding the accommodation he had desired, he was fated to prove the fallacy of human wishes, and find it more secure.

All the disposable force were immediately hurried out in pursuit; some to the banks of the river; some to the forest beyond, and some through the town, where the hubbub soon found its way to the inn, and the party most interested. They were still in deep and troubled consultation about the strange turn of Crowley's scene with Aaron when a waiter, in reply to the question of what was the matter in the street, informed them that a man named Daunt, and another called Bunckle, had just murdered a Captain Cox, and drowned themselves in the river.

The shock of this sudden fate of three persons who had, a moment before, so exclusively occupied them, was naturally very startling, notwithstanding their belief that none of them deserved a better. But it was not long before they were relieved from the waste of too much pity. Farther enquiry modified the report in respect to Cox, and did not confirm the rest of it, for the river had been dragged and no bodies found. But, in any case, there was an end of Lucy's chief hope, for supposing Aaron to have escaped, the penalties he had incurred precluded all chance of his ever returning, and little dependence could be placed in the police, who were at that time few in number, whilst the nature of the country afforded no end of facilities for eluding them.

Still, blank as the prospect was, it was better to await the fortune of the next two or three days than to give it up in despair, and they made up their minds to remain at Lympton till every effort had failed.

Leaving them to this desponding expectation, we must now turn to other acquaintance, whom we have not seen for a long time, and who, without any design of their own, or a thought for any human being but themselves, are not entirely unconnected with the progress of our story.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS PINHORN'S suffering meekness on the day of Polly's farewell for Oakendell had not endured very long. The omission of her name in the invitation had been nursed into such a magnificent insult, that she had never answered a letter from Polly since her departure, till she thought fit to announce her presence in London for the bridal preparations. But however much this circumstance may detract from our admiration, we hope it may still leave some interest for an occasion which usually commands so much; and likewise some curiosity about her metropolitan connections.

Mr. Moses Pinhorn was close of kin to Sir Abraham, though for many years they had ceased to be intimate. Moses had first looked down upon Abraham because he had turned Christian, and then Abraham had looked down upon Moses from the elevation of knighthood. Thus the next generation, represented by Miss Pen, had been as lost as the Lost Tribes, till, elated by her approaching nuptials, she had spread the glad tidings through

the farthest regions of Whitechapel. The proclamation of the grand connection she was about to make had refreshed a great many memories, and, amongst the rest, the memory of Cousin Moses. His felicitations had been more cordial than all the rest, for he had learnt by long experience that rich people require accommodations almost as often as poor ones. He had therefore tapped another fountain of his full heart, and out gushed a pressing invitation. This being exactly what Miss Pen wanted, she was, at the moment we return to her, arranging her trousseau in the gloomy state chamber of an ancient habitation in Dan Street, Beersheba Square ; and in a blear-eyed apartment underneath it were Messrs. Moses and Reuben Pinhorn, father and son.

Moses was a diminutive illustration of the Mombocco Philosophy, with a visage of crinkled chamois leather, not unsuggestive of a treasure from the pyramids, just emerging from its roll of cere cloth ; but with a pair of eyes that twinkled proportionately bright for a nap of two thousand years. They were flitting over the accounts of ruined spendthrifts, like bats in a catacomb ; whilst the other individual—a little under the middle age—soberly dressed, and yellow and dejected, with features that would have been good if they had not drooped too much under the weight of his spirits, was chiefly occupied in observing the motes of a stray sunbeam peeping through the key-hole.

The Hebrew mark, however, so strongly imprinted on the exterior of both of them, was by no means carried out by other stereotyped characteristics; for their calling has, during the present century, introduced Barabbas and his brethren to classes which we believe to have been far less accessible before fashion removed its brilliant receptions to the Court of Bankruptcy; and the language and costume of Israel's money lenders has, it is said, been entirely converted, if nothing else has. In fact, the address of your obliging friend may often form a highly-polished model for yourself; and in all cases of youthful indiscretion, for the inconsiderate old gentleman at home.

Having finished a little sum in compound interest, and entered the product in a closely written page of his ledger, Mr. Pinhorn warily raised his small crest from its folds—for he was wary from habit—and turned it with its two small rays, like the ray through the keyhole, upon his moody son.

“And so, Reuben,” he said, in a voice which never varied from the sweetness of a tamarind, “you are still thinking of that vacant partnership in the house of our kindred at Amsterdam?”

“Yes, father, I was,” replied Reuben, with eyes and tones much less sinister. “It is a very thriving one, and the outgoing partner has made a good fortune.”

“And they have invited you to fill his place. It is friendly.”

"Very; but then I must throw five thousand pounds into the concern."

"Well, Reuben; I have no objection to your doing so?"

"Father!"

"If you can get it."

"Ah!" said the son, his brightness fading, as "all that's bright" generally does. "There's the difficulty! I was wondering whether, in lieu of all that great provision you say you are laying] up for me, you would allow me to compound for this five thousand in hand."

"Don't wonder at anything so impossible, my son; for merchandise is precarious, and prodigals are certain."

Reuben dropped his head submissively, and wished he had the paternal strength of mind. He confessed he was weak enough to prefer anything, however precarious, to living upon the despair of ruined fellow-creatures.

"Fellow-creatures!" answered the suave voice. "Alas, Reuben, would they suffer us to call them so? And do they not bring their despair upon themselves? We help them when they will not help one another; and because we must either exact our profits or be ruined like themselves, they curse us for extortion. For centuries they have excluded us from other resources and compelled us to that which they revile, because we follow in the path of our fathers. We have many who might become Christians, but what is the Christian encouragement to

the many who have done so? Does not the reproach of our nation remain through generations? Is there any medium of consideration for the Jew between usurer and old clothesman? Refute me, my son. Prove that these objects of your concern can feel for us as fellow creatures, and take your five thousand pounds."

The son had no hope of success on such conditions, but still protested that there was nothing he would not rather do than that which oppressed his conscience.

" Still, Reuben, our dealings are fair. We have no concealment. We do not invite them to their loss. We concede to their desire, and they know the price. But if your conscience is not easy let us turn to a better expedient—there is our cousin Penelope. She has thrice the money, and perhaps it is not yet too late. It is odd she should have been here a moon or more, and that the man they call Fozzard should still tarry in the country!"

" I should have thought so too, father; but she says he is engaged in many visits to distinguished families."

" What are their names?"

" Why, that is odd too; for she does not know."

" Reuben, it is odd!"

" Yes, father; and she seems to think so herself. She says his letters come from half the counties in England, and he is always going to start for somewhere else, the next day, but never says where it is."

Mr. Pinhorn could not comprehend such colossal popularity, and his eye kept on twinkling, like the keyhole, through some moments of bland deliberation. "My son," he then resumed, "there is something not right. These numerous engagements, which end and re-commence too rapidly to leave a trace, are like the tricks of the juggler who tosses a whirl of brazen balls whilst he sits upon his stool, threading a mouthful of mock pearls for astonished innocents. I doubt if they are not all paid in imagination to disguise some strong reason for remaining stationary. Such, for instance, as arrest for debt, or other inconveniences which are not pleasant to confess. It is early in the day, Reuben, and I suspect you may do yourself a good turn by girding up your loins for a journey to Broome Warren, and a few friendly enquiries after this gentleman's health. At the worst, it will be a polite attention, and recommend you much to our cousin's approval. You shall be absent on our own business—no matter what, lest she be wroth at our mistrust; and perhaps you may get home again before bed-time."

Reuben rose up at once, with his spirits very much improved. There was no waste in the house of Moses, and minutes were as precious as the pence that make a pound. A very few sufficed to conclude the conversation; and the son was on his way, and the father coiled himself up for another sum in compound interest.

Mr. Pinhorn, the younger, was really a very good

young man, as we have endeavoured to show him, and entertained a great regard for all the world ; though, perhaps, like most people, with a slight preference for himself. So, as he travelled on, he could not help revolving in his mind the charms of his cousin Penelope, and the highly advantageous partnership at Amsterdam. And then he reflected what a very affectionate cousin she was ; how kindly in the long absence of her Edward, she had pierced him with her jetty glance ; how enviable would be Edward's lot ; and yet how much less enviable than his own would have been had Edward been born in the days of Herod ! Pounds sterling could have no attraction whatever for a gentleman so opulent and highly connected, if he really was one or the other ; whilst, to himself, they were redolent of butter-tubs and Dutch cheeses, smoked hams and sides of bacon, pickled herrings, bilious eggs, all varieties of *schnaps*, and the fragrant juice of the juniper ! Still, he wished Edward all the happiness that life could afford ; and he sighed, and was *sure* he did. He should deeply lament any discovery to his prejudice—of course—though it was impossible not to see that if any such were made it would also be the making of himself ; and that Penelope, being constrained to declare off from one side, might not object to declare on to another, in connection with Amsterdam. It was much to be deplored that human nature embraced a vast number of impostors ; but, as such was the case, it was the pain-

ful duty of conscientious people to find them out and prevent them from sinning past redemption. He was sensible that he could himself treat cousin Penelope with devoted — rectitude ; and, under the uncertain state of sublunary affairs, it was perhaps a desideratum that Edward should be proved a rogue—indeed, to save her from excessive regret, the greater rogue the better. He was not sure that he ought not to hope for such a consummation. It was his duty to do so, and therefore he would try—he would try to brave all sacrifice of personal feelings, and honestly annihilate him.

Towards afternoon, he had kicked the last four miles of dust into Broome Warren ; and there he decided upon making his first enquiries at the abode of Miss Pen, where he knew he should find either a young lady strongly prepossessed against Mr. Fozzard, or nobody but the butler, Mr. Sprat, for Pen had made the most of Polly's visit to Goldsworthy to raise her own consequence.

The bell was answered by Mr. Sprat, who stumbled out with great expedition, under the idea that his favourite mistress, Miss Polly, had returned. Finding only a meek, modest stranger, he recovered his dignity, and replied to Reuben's inquiry that “never a one of his missises was at home.”

Reuben expressed his regret, but was happy they had left behind them so confidential a gentleman. If Mr. Sprat would give him leave, he would walk in and rest himself, as he had travelled all the way

from London. Sprat was proud to assent, for it was the first time his leave had ever been asked, and condescendingly showed the way into the neat little parlour, where he gave his visitor the choice of sitting down upon the sofa, or the arm-chair, or the music stool; and complied with his request for the interesting village news by giving him a liberal supply of that article. Beginning with Miss Pinhorn, “or, as some people call her, Miss Pennyloafy,” and finding a very attentive listener, he went off with all the glibness that might have been expected from divers recollections of wounded honour.

“ You ain’t no idea, sir, what a howdacious vixen that ere woman is; for, whilst them as don’t know her are afraid of sending her into convulsions by a wink, she can give a clout of the head fit to drive it through the wall.”

Reuben opened his eyes with mild amazement.

“ True as I’m alive; and if it hadn’t a been for Miss Polly, who’s no more her sister than I’m her grandfather, many’s the time I’d have kicked her shins for it. And when she got took bad about that chap Fozzard you never see the like of her, coz nobody never talked rubbish to her afore, and it set her as mad as a cow with the gadfly.”

Reuben now opened his mouth as well as his eyes, but still with passive attention to Mr.

Sprat's graphic mode of narration. He only requested that gentleman to oblige him with a glass of water, as he felt himself a little overcome by his journey.

"Oh, yes, sir; plenty of that! Pennyloafy gives us full swing at the pump. But perhaps you may be hungry as well as thirsty, and here's been a fine bacon hog killed, and we've just been a frying of his liver and crow."

Whereupon he darted out, for his good nature was not less impulsive than his wrath, and Reuben was left to decide the serious question between pig's fry and no dinner. True the unclean alternative was not an orthodox restorative of Hebrew nature, but if his fate should drive him to Christian forbearance with cousin Pen, it might not be a bad opportunity to commence his conversion. The savour was a strong argument for it, and therefore he expressed himself in very gratifying terms to his liberal host, and at once turned Christian.

Whilst he was paying his first duties to his new persuasion, Sprat was off again, and presently returned with a bottle of brown stout, which, he said, was the last that Fozzard had not drunk; and, as missis would never suspect him of leaving one, he might as well have the credit of finishing that with the rest of the hamper.

Whereupon he twisted off the wire and fired the cork; and then sat apart to regale his eyes and dis-

play his satisfaction by twirling round and round upon the music stool. Between which rotations he now and then stopped to recommend another bit of the crow, and resume the course of his information.

"Missis is gone away to get spliced," he said, "and, if she don't, won't she be an out and outer when she comes back?"

"And is it your opinion, Mr. Sprat, that she is likely to be disappointed?"

"Well, sir, I cannot say; but it looks very like it."

"Indeed! And why so?" And Reuben took another drop of stout, which effervesced at his eyes.

"Why, sir, we can't see how anybody can be spliced without there's somebody to splice 'em to; and she's been gone ever so long, and that 'ere Fozzard don't wag a peg."

"Is he still here? I heard he was making a great many visits in distant parts of the country."

"Not he. I don't believe anybody would let him in. He's been nowhere but to Cheek's; and they do say he can't get away. I myself heard Cheek tell him one day as they asked me to wait upon 'em, after the servant-gal went off, that he shouldn't part with him till after the place was sold."

"What place, Mr. Sprat?"

“ Why, the Chase—Broome Warren Chase, as they call it. They make a great secret about it; but when they had been drinking pretty considerable, they thought I was a young ‘un and warn’t up to ‘em. Warn’t I? I understood enough to know they are going up to London to-morrow morning a-purpose to do something very particklar about it, though I can’t say what.”

Reuben happened to know a great deal about this approaching sale; for Cox, on the refusal of Mr. Badger, had applied to his father to obtain the Order from Chancery; so he asked whether it was supposed that Mr. Fozzard thought of making the purchase.

“ The purchase of Broome Warren!” replied Sprat, with great scorn. “ I don’t fancy he has got money enough to purchase one of the hog-sties. But there’s something up about it, and no mistake. There was another chap here—a Captain Cox—who was one of ‘em, and I heered Cheek ask what had become of him, and a-most fall out with Fozzard for swearing he didn’t know. Well, that was true for once: he didn’t know then, but he does now, and so does everybody else, for the whole parish is a-talking about it.”

The name of Captain Cox was another strong call upon Reuben’s attention. “ Cox! What Captain Cox is that? I know a gentleman of that name.”

“ Well, then, all I can say is, the sooner you cut

him the better; if he ain't cut his stick a-ready. What Captain Cox? Why him as I heard say got a lot of money from somebody as was murdered a long time ago."

Reuben was as much surprised as his placid nature permitted. "And why," he said, "do you think he is not a gentleman?"

"A-cause gentlemen ain't used to be put in prison for breaking into people's houses, for which they say he is quite sure to be hanged, unless, as I say, he ain't dead just in time to save hisself. He got a jolly rough handling last night from two other conwicks. There's all about it in the 'County Chronicle,' which everybody was a-reading this morning. They said there wasn't any hope of him; and that, if he should live to be hanged, the king would come in for all he has got and be a man of fortin. The two chaps what pitched into him jumped into the river and drownded theirselves. But I'll run and borrow the paper for you, and then you can see all about it."

"Indeed you will oblige me very much!"

And away scampered Sprat. Prospects were sadly alarming for Edward, but clearing very much in another direction! And then, who could tell what sort of revolution these tidings of Cox might create at home? He knew that Father Moses had enormous transactions with him, and that Badger had several times been making inquiries about them. He knew, also, that Moses could recollect nothing

about them; but might not Cox's mishap refresh his memory? The news must be of very great importance; but, of what sort, was known only to the keen head of the establishment. Reuben had always been thought too honest to be trustworthy, and could only wonder, which he did very anxiously, till Sprat returned, out of breath as usual, with the county paper. There was the grand article! Three columns, with three headings in large capitals. First there was, "Committal of Captain Cox on a Capital Charge;" then, "Deadly Assault upon the same in the Gaol of Lympton;" then, "Fearful Death of the Perpetrators." And then the leading-article on the claims of the Crown.

"Tain't more nor fourpence, sir."

But, as Reuben thought it worth a great deal more, he gladdened his messenger's heart with a crown-piece. After which, with the expression of many very sincere hopes that they might soon be better acquainted, he stepped over to Dr. Choke's to buy a cigar. Here he entered into a few more of such casual questions as strangers are used to ask, and found Sprat's communications quite confirmed. Mr. Fozzard had never been absent for a day since Pen's departure, and was at that moment busied in his usual avocations, whatever they might be, in the room over the shop. Then, memorandum, Edward had not told the truth; ergo, Edward was a cheat! Ergo, it was Reuben's duty to show him up; ergo, eggs, butter, cheese, and

schiedam were looking up likewise! And therewith, Reuben puffed away at his cigar, and kicked the dust back again to his station to catch the night-train.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOT feeling very curious as to the mode in which Moses and Miss Pen entertained each other during the traveller's absence, we have made no enquiry; for which we hope the reader is much obliged to us. It was late when he returned to excuse the many hours' lapse of his assiduities and receive a significant benediction; for the smile, so strange to his melancholy features, left little doubt of his being the glad messenger of grief to the tribe of Fozzard. And then Moses pleasantly admitted that the good youth had been sore afflicted by the long expectation of the bridegroom, and had journeyed to a far country to enquire what ailed him; upon which Reuben took up the tale of his pilgrimage, and woefully proclaimed the stupendous fact that Edward was a son of Baal.

Let us follow the example of other historians who find their powers paralyzed, and draw a veil over Miss Pen for the remainder of that night.

As soon as she was led off by a dark-eyed maiden to her couch of hysterics, Reuben drew the County Chronicle from his pocket, and proceeded with the other portion of his news. What Moses thought of it will appear in what he did, and we believe it better to await the result of the shot than to blind our reader with the smoke.

When morning came, Miss Pen had considered that if she did not get well she could not go to the auction, and prove to Reuben's eyes how far he had misjudged the best of men. And so she decided upon getting well, and well she got. She remembered, she said, having once expressed a slight wish that she were the mistress of Broome Warren Chase, and now it would appear that Edward had resolved not to present his hand till it conveyed that bridal gift. How delicate the intended surprise! How like her Edward, and how unlike anybody else! Reuben thought so too, as he handed her into a cab, and took his seat by her side, leaving Moses serenely occupied with another sum, by which he discovered that, deducting five thousand from fifteen, there remained ten, and that ten thousand laid out at forty per cent. produced four thousand per annum. A nice little income wherewith to commence housekeeping.

During the journey to the auction mart Pen was in such a transcendent state of excitement, that Reuben, notwithstanding his commercial preoccupations, was greatly afraid his retiring disposition might be brought into blushing publicity by a

series of fits and screams in the midst of the crowd. He was sure they would occur before the business was over; so when they drew up to the entrance amongst the usual rabble of idlers, and a porter let down the steps, he enquired whether it would not be possible to occupy some spare nook in the building, where they could see what was going on without mixing in the bustle. The man was afraid not; but when Pen enquired if he knew anything of a gentleman named Fozzard, he had no doubt.

“ Mr. Fozzard ! Oh, I beg your pardon, ma’am ! Mr. Fozzard has a room next to the great one, and if you are acquainted with *him*, you can see everything very comfortably.”

Oh, yes, Mr. Fozzard was a great friend !

Whereupon there was no more to be said; and taking her companion’s arm with a smile of triumph, she followed their conductor through a confusion of passages and the lumber of late auctions, to a glazed door and green curtain. On entering this, she was in the act of rushing forward to the arms of the dignified creature who could not mingle in such miscellaneous company. But the room, excepting two wooden chairs and a small deal table, with a large pewter inkstand, was empty. On the opposite side was another glazed door and another green curtain, on each side of which the porter obligingly placed the chairs, and left their occupants turning up the corners and

peeping at a large assemblage in the great auction room.

Everybody was busy; some in confidential discussions, some in wondering what brought them there, and some at a long, green-baize table, standing lengthways from the curtain, whereon were exhibited a great variety of plans and views of the Broome Warren estate; all, as Pen declared, very much in the beautiful style of Mr. Fozzard. Amongst the unseated attendance was observed an individual, decidedly from the country, picking up acquaintance with everybody who looked like a bidder, and apparently making observations very adverse to the sale. As he turned up his visage towards Miss Pen, she had no difficulty in distinguishing the lineaments of her excellent friend, Mr. Cheek. Good gracious, what could he be doing! When it immediately flashed upon her acute senses that he was trying to dissuade purchasers in order that Edward might obtain a better bargain. So kind! so like him! But where was Edward himself?

From the door where she sat was a narrow flight of steps, morticed to the wall, and looking like the ascent to a pulpit; where they went to, no manner of squint could follow. Perhaps they led to some gallery overhead, for the accommodation of the more distinguished company; perhaps, thought Reuben, they led to the auctioneer's rostrum.

The question was soon settled by a demonstra-

tion of some public impatience, and three taps of a hammer, as if some heavy hand were driving a nail; and suddenly there was a dead silence.

"He—e—e—m," began the unseen orator, clearing his voice with a rolling rattle which resembled a shoot of brick rubbish.

Pen was electrified !

"That's Edward's hem!" she cried. "I should know it from all the hems in the world!"

It was followed by a tremendous application of his handkerchief.

"And is that Mr. Edward's nose?" enquired her bland companion.

"What an unlooked-for treat! He is going to make an oration!"

And the observed of all observers launched forth on the wings of inspiration.

"Gentlemen," he thundered, "there is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the full, as a great author observes, leads on to fortune; and on such a tide it is my business on this occasion to act as your pilot."

"Beautiful!" whispered Pen.

"Empires have gone to wreck: crowns have wanted heads to wear them: and mankind have stood aghast till some keen-sighted individual has boldly stretched forth his hand to pluck the fruit from the bough which overhung the pathway of all, and which all have too late repented they had not enterprise to appropriate."

"Sublime!" ejaculated Pen.

“Such, gentlemen, is too often the case with the lordly domains of aristocracy. They invite us like blackberries in the champagne—if I may be excused for borrowing an expression from the language of a proximate country—and we let them drop into the first mouth that is undeterred by the bramble’s abrasion.”

“What an illustration!”

“In words less towering in the regions of Parnassus, we too often lose resplendent opportunities by hesitation at a nugatory application of capital. Were either of my eminent partners of the firm of Knockdown and Gone in this place, with their endowments of surpassing eloquence, the estate of which I have the honour to be the unworthy proponent, would afford a description to which my limited powers are wholly inadequate; but, having domiciled in the locality and deeply studied its incomparable capabilities, I have been selected to offer it to the competition of an enlightened public.”

The listeners again regarded each other.

“What a mistake!” faltered the sinking Penelope. “This is only the auctioneer. Some one who has heard my Edward speak in public, and taken him for a model.”

Reuben looked sedate, and said it was an odd coincidence that both gentlemen should have domiciled at Broome Warren.

“Gentlemen,” resumed the gifted elocutionist, after another prolonged shoot of brick-rubbish, “to

many of this influential assemblage I have long been known in my humble capacity of clerk in this important house in which I have recently been distinguished as the baldest of the heads,—forgive the figurative allusion in the recollection of my literary habitudes as author of our widely-circulated monthly catalogue.”

“Don’t you think, Cousin Penelope, the literary habitudes rather add to the coincidences?”

“And for all that period, gentlemen, and throughout my professional calls at the aristocratic mansions of the great,”—here his tumid inspirations stuck in his throat, and Reuben had a moment to wonder that there should be yet one coincidence more. He really should not be surprised if the two gentlemen were actually visitors at the same houses!

“At the mansions of the great, gentlemen,—I felicitate myself that my recommendations have been esteemed worthy of confidence, and on the present conjuncture I shall be happy to climaximate their unimpeachability, by the investment of fifteen thousand pounds in the speculative improvement of any portion of the lands of Broome Warren with which the purchaser may be pleased to dispense.”

“How odd!” remarked Reuben; “that is exactly your fortune, cousin!”

“It is not Edward, Reuben, but the imitation is overpowering!”

Mr. Fozzard—for we sadly suspect it was he—continued to astonish his audience with alternations of wit and sublimity till his descriptions were complete, and then came the most anxious moment of the day, for there was nothing farther to delay the competition of the bidders. There was a brisk and general looking about for somebody to begin, and every appearance of a spirited contest, when Mr. Cheek was observed to direct an alarming scowl at the rostrum. What could he mean by that?

“Perhaps,” said Reuben, “Mr. Cheek thinks he has said too much in recommendation, and will give his friend, Mr. Edward, a hard bargain.”

“Depend upon it!” replied Miss Pen. “So like Mr. Cheek!”

Whatever meaning the scowl conveyed, the hammer tapped again to signify a postscript.

“Gentlemen, I am reminded, by certain indications of inquiry, that I have not been exempt from a very frequent occurrence in extemporaneous effusions, which is the omission of the principal subject. It was my duty to acquaint you, at the outset of these proceedings, that their purpose is to foreclose a mortgage, which, though somewhat considerable, will not, I trust, prove an impediment to your emulation—a mortgage, gentlemen, of a—an—hundred thousand pounds—a mere bagatelle in the eyes of opulence, and easily removable by—an—only paying it off.”

“Aye, aye!” cried Cheek, with a look of honesty

that defied all thought of prearrangement. “ You are employed for Chancery and make the best case you can ; but Chancery wants nothing unfair. The mortgagee *won’t* be paid off. He has too good a bargain, and can keep it as long as he likes. Who-ever buys Broome Warren buys the mortgagee with it ? Who is he ? What is he ? Where is he ? Ain’t his name Cox ? And ain’t he now in Lympton Gaol for housebreaking ? Speak out, and tell folks you are selling them a housebreaker, who will call upon them once a quarter ! Tell us all about him ! If *you* won’t, the ‘ County Chronicle’ *will* ! ” And he tossed it amongst the excellent company, who all cried Bravo ! at his public spirit.

“ Gentlemen,” resumed he of the hammer, “ it is no part of my avocations to inquire which side of the antipodes of reputation may localize my clientage. Will any gentleman advance upon the mortgage with its responsibilities ? ”

There was a dead silence. Nobody liked responsibilities to the hero of the “ County Chronicle.”

“ Going, gentlemen, for one hundred thousand pounds. A noble property at one time, and requiring a mere outlay of twenty thousand more, and a few years of liberal cultivation, to make it so again ! Did you favour me with a bid, sir ? ”

“ No ! ” replied a monied-looking member of the plousiocracy, turning his back.

“ I am instructed to sell, gentlemen, without reservation. Will no one be good enough to say

another thousand? Going for one hundred thousand! A purchase well worth the consideration of any guardian of an infant millionaire who may require a palatial residence when he comes of age! I beg pardon, Mr. Cheek, I did not hear you."

"Oh, nothing! I was only lamenting that the family estate of my best friend, Sir Harry Longland, must pass into the hands of a felon in gaol!"

"Perhaps, sir, you may be tempted to secure it to the owner. Permit me to say one more thousand."

Mr. Cheek shook his head. He had no authority. Sir Harry might not sanction such a measure; and what should he do if the purchase were thrown upon his own hands?

"No danger of that, I should apprehend, sir. Do allow me to say just one thousand?"

Everybody looked with interest on the hesitation of the faithful agent. No; quite out of the question. The place must go—he could not presume to buy it in!

"Pray pardon me, sir, for propounding the alternative of buying it on your own account, and transferring it back whenever Sir Harry may desire it."

Mr. Cheek acknowledged there was something in that. He had never thought of it. But the risk was too great. No; it would ruin him! and yet—he owed everything to Sir Harry. Yes, he must venture—say a thousand!

"Thank you, sir, thank you ! a hundred and one thousand bid ! Will any gentleman advance upon a hundred and one thousand ? Going for a hundred and one thousand !—Last time, for a hundred and one thousand !" A pause—nobody breathed ; everybody stared : and thwack went the hammer. Mr. Christopher Cheek was proclaimed the lord of Broome Warren Chase !

"Reuben," exclaimed Miss Pen, clasping her hands with a smack of hysterics, "Reuben ! Then Edward has *not* bought it ?"

"No ; cousin Penelope," responded the mild Reuben.

"It is Cheek himself !"

"Yes, cousin Penelope ; but not quite so like himself as he was a little while ago."

"And Mary !—Mary was right !"

Amazement acted like a turnscREW, and almost twirled her fine eyes out.

"Never mind, cousin !" and Reuben shrank with affright. "Never mind ! anybody may be right sometimes, and Miss Mary may still be quite wrong about Mr. Edward ; though he has forgotten his wedding present."

During this touching little dialogue, the rap of the hammer seemed to have conjured up a legion of evil spirits. A good many of the tenants of Broome Warren had run up to the sale, to see who was to be their new landlord, and what was to become of them, and likewise to make a general representation

of their grievances at the hands of Mr. Cheek. Farmers are said to be better judges of ploughs than politics, and Mr. Mangel Wurzel and certain bucolic brethren, who had been gaping to ingulph those of the agent and auctioneer, no sooner found them out than they set up a storm of “Noa, noa! Sheame, rogues, and robbery;” to which some scores, with more intelligence and less moral courage to be leaders, added a rattling battery of “Collusions! swindlings, and illegalities!” Nothing grows so rapidly as a row, and no progeny is more unnatural to its parents. Messrs. Cheek and Colleague very soon found it expedient to stumble over one another into the sanctuary with the glass door and green curtain, and there they were brought to a stand by the petrifying presence of Medusa and her snakes.

“Pennylopy!” gasped the two statues. To which the brazen tongue of her oldest friend appended a polite question of “How the deuce she got there?”

“To detect an impostor and a hypocrite?” replied Medusa, and the toss of her snakes tossed her back into the arms of cousin Reuben.

“Fozzy,” said Cheek, “it’s all up with the fifteen thousand!”

“Cheek,” retorted Fozzy with unwonted energy; “whose fault is that?”

“Why couldn’t you spout less, and get off peaceably?”

“Why couldn’t we have had the wedding first and the sale after?”

“ Why should I be fool enough to trust you, after you betrayed Cox ?”

“ And who made me betray Cox ?”

“ And who, if you come to that, made you a cheat before ?”

“ And who, if you come to that, makes me a cheat now ?”

There is a proverb about the worm that we tread upon, and another about evil communications ; both of which, after a few more sharp shots of recrimination, were made good by a furious pommelling and scratching of two bald crowns ; their respective eyes and noses being too much shocked to be witnesses thereof. But, before we could see the amount of disaster, the door was assailed by a charge of the Mangel Wurzels, and open it flew, with a storm of splinters and hail which swept away the combatants on the opposite side, with the hob nails very close behind them.

“ Well done !” shrieked the awful daughter of Sir Abraham. “ Well done ! Oh, that they had seven league boots with double soles ! See how I stamp on them ! See how I tear their hair !”

Alas, Miss Pen forgot it was her own hair ! And, alas, again for those who confide too much in the delicacy of the drooping bud when a little forcing may afford them a sample of the expanded flower ! Nevertheless, cousin Reuben seemed no wise discouraged from transporting it on the tide of milk and honey now flowing in such a navigable current

to the Zuider Zee. He bore it tenderly to the cab at the auction door ; protected it from the rude jolts of Jehu ; smoothed its leaves and re-arranged its tendrils ; and conveyed it, blooming like the rose of Sharon, to Dan Street, Beersheba Square.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next day saw Crowley and Lucy and the Vicar once more at Goldsworthy, where we may be sure the welcome was proportioned to their passed agitations which had all been reported as they occurred. The young Lord Goldfield was not present, neither was Tom Philpot, though Crowley had written to appoint him. The first was just recovering from his dangerous illness, though the traces of its effects were sadly visible on Lady Goldfield ; and the other had not been seen since Crowley had hied him on to the scent of Captain Cox.

“ Not seen him ? ” said Crowley. “ Why, where is he ? ”

“ Nobody knows,” replied Polly, “ since he parted from you. He is too fond of a chase to give it up, and has gone on with such eagerness and to such distances that we have never known where to send our news. Perhaps, now Captain Cox is

taken, this letter may announce his arrival at home."

Unhappily it announced something of more consequence, for it electrified everybody with the tidings of the sale, at which, under the guidance of his able detectives, he had actually been present.

The letter went on to say that Tom had been at home since the last night, and had spent the whole of it in getting up a reception for the new squire amongst the tenants of the estate, every invited guest being requested to bring all the friends he had in the world, by which the party would be extended to the utmost limits of Goose Green.

As Tom's attentions seemed to be carrying him rather too far, and to risk some danger of a general riot, Crowley thought he should not do amiss by riding over and using a little moderation; and taking the same occasion to bring Mr. Bloomer his letters, for which the old gentleman was more impatient every moment. He was therefore very soon upon his way; and, to fill up the time it occupied, we must look in at the Rosary.

Mrs. Toogood having, as we have seen, found it expedient to dispense with her almoner, had taken the eleemosynary department of the parish government upon herself. We question whether the substitution was any great improvement; for, whereas the benefit in the first case was never ascertained,

the evil in the latter was said to be very apparent.

Folks who were hard-hearted enough to possess common sense declared that to give unwisely was worse than not giving at all ; but Mrs. Toogood was more benevolent, and considered that whilst it was a duty to give, no good Christian could presume to judge whether it was wise or not. Accordingly, as the benignant and affable sovereign of Broome Warren, Mrs. Toogood began to hold her drawing-rooms once a week, which, of course, her considerate subjects took care should not fall on the Board day of the Union, since they were imperatively called upon to pay their homage at both. The effect was that the moral and mundane prosperity advanced in opposite ways, for whilst one went up the other went rapidly down. At the same time Mrs. Toogood took up another enlightened maxim, and this was that people who did the most wrong, required the most encouragement to do right ; consequently the rule of right was soon erased from the Broome Warren code, and all who were turned out of work for idleness or drunkenness, or other difference with the constituted authorities, were dismissed by those guardian spirits more importunate and exasperated and bent on worse mischief than ever.

At last the more thoughtful of the parishioners began to be alarmed, and resolved to make a deputation to the Rosary, in the hope of more serious attention than they had met with individually.

They proceeded in strict rule, according to a recent report in the "County Chronicle" of a deputation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mrs. Toogood was solicited, two or three days before, to appoint a time for receiving them on important matters connected with the welfare of the parish; a desire to which she very courteously acceded; feeling, as she did, much gratified that her measures for the public good were so highly appreciated.

Miss Betsy, who had long ago established her perfect innocence of all that appeared against her at the Petty Sessions, was charged to see the cakes and chairs tastefully laid out in the principal drawing-room; and the butler and the footman and the coachman were to be in their best dresses.

The magnates were punctual to a minute, and marched in solemn procession through expanding portals and deferential bows to the circle prepared for them; and then Miss Betsy announced that a flight of stout gentlemen in corduroys and cotton handkerchiefs had settled on the drawing-room chairs, like so many pouter pigeons, and were raking the beautiful carpet into a straw yard; which probably meant that Miss Betsy had old grudges against parish government, and considered herself pretty well off as she was.

The reception left nothing to be desired. Mr. Bulfinch, the portly chairman, brewer, maltster, and magistrate, presented his cabinet *seriatim*, and every gentleman was polished up to the occasion;

and then Mrs. Toogood gracefully dropped her flounces round her chair and commenced the conference.

She expressed much gratification that she possessed any power in furtherance of the objects of so influential a deputation. It had always been her anxious desire to use what means she could command, in addition to her best advice, for the benefit of all classes, and it would give her great happiness to afford as much more as it might occur to them to suggest.

“Mrs. Toogood, ma’am, we beg your pardon, ma’am, but that is not exactly our object. With respect to further aid, we have none of us the conscience to impose such a tax upon your generosity. We feel that we are indebted to it too much already; and the purpose of our intrusion is respectfully to hope you will now be persuaded that you have done enough.”

“I am sensible, Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,” replied Mrs. Toogood, with serene humility, “of your kind consideration; but, alas! who in this world can say he has done good enough! Whatever is given us is in trust for those who are more in want than ourselves, whether it be material or mental; and, so far as my humble powers will enable me, you may be sure of my co-operation to my life’s end.”

“We honour your sentiments, ma’am, most profoundly; and as you condescend to favour us with your co-operation, we trust we may venture on the

liberty of consulting you, whether want, without reference to the cause of it, is a valid claim to charity?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Chairman, we are to give alms to the poor, and I consider it would be going beyond our instructions to ask how they became so."

"But what, ma'am, if the alms we give should happen to be the cause of their being poor? If it caused them to be idle; and, being idle, to spend their time in the usual habits of idleness, the tendency of which we find destructive to themselves and dangerous to the rest of the community?"

"That, Mr. Bulfinch, is the usual plea of those who are unwilling to bestow it. I cannot think it destructive to honesty any more than the rains from heaven are destructive to the flowers of the field."

"Nor perhaps would it be, ma'am, were the objects that receive it always as pure as the flowers of the field; but we are not sure that even the rains from heaven are not to be lamented when they drop upon a bed of nettles."

"That they be, ma'am, I do assure you," broke in farmer Spud, "and if you was to see my field of wuts you'd say so."

Several other gentlemen were going off into the agricultural branch of the argument, but the chairman called them to order.

"You will excuse me," resumed Mrs. Toogood, with patronizing blandness, "if I cannot see how

charity can be charged as the possible incentive to crime."

"Why, ma'am, we'll submit a case which has rather inclined us to that way of thinking. We suppose we have seen an able-bodied man or woman who has no visible means of living, and find them refuse work by which they may comfortably maintain themselves; and upon enquiry we learn they are better supported for doing nothing. We want to know whether those who so support them are right in divesting themselves of so much means of helping the helpless, and whether they are not responsible for the evil doings of those who have no obligation to do better?"

"Certainly not; no reproach can attach to charity. We are told that it covereth a multitude of sins."

"But does it quite cover the sins of which it is the cause, and the neglect of enquiring how far it is deserved? We will take the liberty of submitting another case. A man commits a highway robbery, and is pursued from parish to parish by the constables till he is afraid to show himself, and is driven to ask charity, and obtains it from some benevolent lady or gentleman who knows nothing about him but his own account of himself; is not that lady or gentleman guilty, in some sort, of rewarding him for his crime?"

Mrs. Toogood turned down the corners of her mouth to consider the matter.

"The case you put, Mr. Chairman, will scarcely

bear an argument ; for, independent of the justness of characterizing our acts by their intentions, I do not see how charity can fail to do good when accompanied by the good advice which is the most valuable part of it. Were this omitted I certainly agree with you that the duty is very imperfectly performed and may possibly fail of effect."

"Yes, ma'am," replied another acute gentleman, who began to perceive that the Chairman was putting the lady's own case before her. "But we are not all equally gifted, and are puzzled to know what is likely to be the case with those who have the capability of bestowing the charity but not the advice ; and we need not submit to you that this is the position of a great many ?"

"Alas, that is a very just observation ! In that case it is the duty of the benevolent to borrow advice from their more experienced and reflecting neighbours ; who, I believe, are always ready to give it if they can give nothing else. It is my custom, never to deny it to any one."

"We are fully aware of your great goodness in that respect, ma'am," said another of the Board, who were all now beginning to be ambitious ; "but whilst we have the best means of knowing that our rogues and vagabonds take the money, we don't see how we can be sure they take the advice."

"I cannot say that I have ever had any doubt, gentlemen. Numbers of the poor distressed villagers come to me for it constantly and remain most attentively for hours together. They tell me they

find great benefit, and are growing daily more contented with their lot."

"And so, ma'am, they have good reason to be," replied Mr. Bulfinch, "for it is well known what measures you take to make them so; and how the fame of your goodness has filled our parish from a good many parishes round about. No doubt, ma'am, you are provided with such counsels, as will arrest the evil consequences that some people predict, from the extended connection. Mrs. Toogood, ma'am, the times are dangerous, and our great respect makes it difficult to warn you against too much encouragement to them. We sincerely ask pardon if we offend; and hope, as you are so forgiving to our thieves, you will not refuse some allowance for your more honest neighbours; especially as we stand a good chance of being all murdered together."

Mrs. Toogood did not lose the serene pride of a martyr, and was quite invincible. "She ought not to be surprised," she said, "at any interference against improvement. She had met with much opposition and she expected much more, but she was not to be discouraged in doing what she felt to be right, and was satisfied that the objects for whom she exerted her good offices were the most deserving, the most grateful and the most orderly."

"And, as I'm a living man," cried a startled member of the Board, almost flinging a somersault from his chair, "here comes a mob of 'em to prove it!"

True enough, there was a rabble round the hall

door, and a sudden and very discordant clamour in the hall itself. Another moment proved it to be a second deputation, selected by the community complained of to join issue with the first. Some of them had seen it march up to the conference, and guessing at the object, had spread a war-cry through the holes and corners of the village, and assembled a variegated regiment of Mrs. Toogood's favourites to stand up for their character.

Mr. Bulfinch, like most gentlemen in office, was important and irascible, and much more courageous than mere common folks, and his first impulse was to demand permission to turn the intruders out of the house; but whilst he was doing this, the intruders were bent upon performing the same favour for himself. The old butler, indignant at the desecration of the establishment, had no objection that both parties should get the worst of it, and, having orders never to deny any applicant for charity and good advice, showed the new comers, with all ceremony, into the presence of the enemy.

The first of the new delegates to bounce in and bob her curtsey was Mrs. Nancy Crimp, known in her vicinity as high priestess of the beer shop, a bulky bundle of patchwork, that heaved with the fermentations of a quagmire. The dappled hues of anger flitted over her ample cheeks, and her eyes were two little furnaces, but her mouth was widened into an expression of snarling humility. Her companions were a menagerie beaten out of the bushes of the forest, which had scratched them rather bare and

picturesquely, as if it were the season for shedding their coats, but it had not scratched away their noisy little produce or their lungs. Amongst them was a strong sprinkling of the other sex, the most conspicuous of whom were the tinker, the sweep, and the rat-catcher, none of whom, however, had quite the resolute bearing of the ladies.

Most people would have been a little discomposed at such a display of acquaintance, but Mrs. Toogood had a stately pride in them, for the lower their grade in humanity, the deeper she felt she had descended into the gold mine of her Christian duties.

"I am always happy to see you, Mrs. Crimp," she said, "but you perceive I am at this moment engaged."

"Yes, ma'am, but if you please, ma'am, no offence, that's just the reason why we come," replied the leering old termagant, with a voice like a hurdy-gurdy, "for we heered the Gargin was here to set you again us, and thought you'd be glad to hear what we've got to say in our defence, which, if you please, ma'am, is as fair for one side as it is for t'other."

"Yes, ma'am, yes, that's all fair!" was the chorus that rounded off this solo, with the rumbling bass of Sweep, Rat-catcher, and Co.

The worthy chairman could no longer restrain his wrath, but standing manfully prominent, with one arm a-kimbo, and the other in the usual action of firing a pistol, broke forth with a burst of withering

eloquence that would have raised the envy of Demosthenes.

" Why you abominable old Mrs. Crimp ! How dare you set your foot in a respectable house like this, with your train of pestilence, and their squalling progeny of sins ? Ain't you ashamed to be seen out of jail, and to come here misleading an excellent lady, and making her pay you for taking her advice, and helping this refuse from the hedge-ways and hog-sties to wash it down in your den of a beer shop ? Don't you nightly make her the roaring joke of every tramp that is running away from the constable ? And don't this tribe of squalling pole-cats give you the mock name of Mrs. Toogood, and pretend to come to you for good advice, and put the company in fits by asking your 'sentiments' about their next iniquity ? Mrs. Toogood, ma'am, excuse me, ma'am, for we've all the highest respect for you, and don't like to see you scandalized and imposed upon any more than the union ; but we shall see more, and a great deal more, and shan't be long about it, for the magistrates are swearing in special constables, and the yeomanry are drawn out, and Swing and his jack-o'-lanterns are come back to burn the place before it is due, and you'll have to answer for every bit of it."

" Who are you," broke in the cracked instrument of Mrs. Crimp, " that talks so glibly about jails, as if everybody had been there but yourself ? When was I ever in jail, or like to go there, 'cept when somebody took summut as wasn't hern or his'n, and

hid it away in my house, which was taking a great liberty, as they hadn't a right to do? And when was I afore the justices for keeping open house after reg'lar hours, 'cept yesterday, and may be once or twice afore? And didn't I pay the fine honestly, and ain't I a right to do what I paid for? Tell me that! When did ever Mrs. Toogood—blessings on her—twit me with accusations as was false? And if I allowed the gals to call me by her beautiful good name, and giv 'em good advice, as I fancied her honour would have done, though maybe it warn't quite so good, who's a right to find fault with me for trying to imitate a good example, which, bless her dear soul, was the most praiseworthy thing that ever I did?"

"And so I says, you great Bulfinch," cried a younger slattern, with a brace of babies in her arms. "What business have you to say my innocent young uns is a prodigy of sins? I says they're as great a right to be here as yourself, and greater too, for they pays the parish eighteen pence a week for their maintenance, every blessed soul of 'em, which is more nor ever you did."

And here was a hullabaloo, after the manner of "hear, hear!" in a more august assembly, in the midst of which another gentleman of the Board propped up his coat tails, and extended his arm, as if about to fire another pistol. Something he shot off about persuading Mrs. Toogood that the moon was a green cheese, and a great deal about contraband morality, but there was too much cross-firing

to follow any particular aim, till Miss Crimp directed a particularly good one in a plum cake provided for the deputation, full at the head of her assailant."

"Take that, you low shopkeeper!" she screamed, "and behave yourself 'mongst ladies and gentlemen."

"Serves him right," cried a good many more; "with his green cheese!"

"There, Mrs. Toogood! There, ma'am! That's what you bring the lower orders to!"

"Who do you call lower orders, you petty parish screw! with your light weights and low wages! knock him down, Ratcatcher."

"There, ma'am, there! We hope your eyes are open now! There's flat revolution begun, and you've not left honest folks enough to lock up the thieves."

Luckily for both parties Mrs. Toogood was always imperturbable, and saw reason when nobody else could. Her usual habit of reconciling to her own satisfaction whatever was disapproved by other people, was not less conspicuous than usual.

"She was by no means surprised," she said, "that a virtuous young woman should be indignant at a slur upon her reputation and the pedigree of her innocent babes. These were her decided sentiments, though she entirely disapproved of the mode of reasoning adopted by Betsy Crimp, as such arguments were not in accordance with female delicacy, or, generally speaking, conducive

to conviction. To the worthy member of the deputation, whom she was sorry to see blowing his nose, she was sure she had only to recal the Christian proverb of ‘Least said is soonest mended,’ with which she should be happy to consider the business of the day concluded.”

Wherewith she curtsied her unmistakable permission for a general departure; which both parties were unmistakably determined not to take.

“No, ma’am, no,” said the rat-catcher. “It ain’t fair that we should turn out and leave these Gargins to take away our characters. Let them go fust, and when we’ve had time to prove as we’re all up right and down straight, we’ll go to, but not afore. Everybody’s character is his own, and nobody has a right to meddle with it but his self.”

“That’s what I says, ma’am,” added the chimney-sweep. “And it’s as much for your credit as oun to prove our respectability; for we ain’t going to hear them that’s been good to us called encouragers of lower orders and revolutionizers; and if they let’s go at us in that way, I’m he, ma’am, as sweeps your chimleys, and I’m blest if I don’t punch it out with the best of ‘em !”

“And so will I,” said one.

“And so will I,” said another.

And “grim visaged war” certainly did anything but “smooth his rugged front” upon Messrs. Bulfinch and deputation, when, in the last moment of suspense, a cry was heard from the outsiders of

“constables and soldiers,” which suddenly turned the advance to a right-about; Mrs. Crimp taking her regiment out of action like a crab in a hurry, and Mr. Bulfinch leading the pursuit to support Captain Drinkwater’s cavalry.

“Betsy,” said her mistress, with the calmness of a martyr, “you see what trials attend those whose mission it is to improve their generation; but such has been the appreciation in which all have been held whose views have exceeded ordinary perception. We must do our duty, Betsy, without fear of consequences; and, if evil comes of it, the fault is theirs who defeat our good intentions. The world must be reformed in despite of its perversity, and I do not yet despair of contenting everybody.”

“Dear, mem, how clever you must be! I hope, mem, you’ll begin soon.”

“I have only been withheld, Betsy, by the excellence of the plans which it now seems advisable to abandon, and shall instantly prepare. For which I wish you to give notice that my receptions will, from this day, be discontinued; for, if I can produce universal peace and good-will without subjecting the valuable articles of my drawing-room to be used in personal contention, I think, upon the whole, that it is better to lose no time.”

The relief of the Rosary was effected according to the best military and constabulary tactics of Broome Warren, for no prisoners were taken and no casualties occurred; and Mrs. Toogood was left plenipotentiary to negotiate a new state of things,

which, in a mind like hers, was, of course, in no need of deliberation. The happy thought to which she had alluded was an immediate correspondence with the Emigration Society, which, at that period, were eager to confer upon the United States the blessings of the Old Country's redundancy. Leaving her at her desk very deeply absorbed in a lengthy list of recommendations, and secure of great applause from her deputation for the future, we must now pay some attention to their obligations for the past.

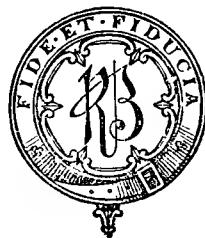
END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

CHAPTER I.

CROWLEY had ridden direct from Goldsworthy to his friend Tom, with whom he was in long and interesting discussion of recent adventures till long after the commotion at the Rosary, of which Tom, having reached home so late on the previous night, was as ignorant as himself. The afternoon was advanced when they set out to the scene of Mr. Cheek's reception, which had been correctly timed by enquiries in London ; and then they first learnt how far the preparations exceeded expectation, and how threatening they looked. The assemblage of so many strangers, all of the labouring classes, and from no one knew where, outnumbered the Broome Warren dependents by more than ten times, and no one knew what brought them. Great distress for employment and food was common in all directions, and bands of hundreds had marched from one place to another to obtain them, but they

were too many to be either employed or fed in obscure parishes which had already their complement of necessities. Whilst we notice the singularity, we feel bound to add that they appeared to have no thought of plunder, though it is not to be denied that they did smash a certain quantity of machinery which had very much lessened the want of hands. The incursion so far out of more frequented roads being little understood, formed some excuse for astonished ratepayers to find fault with more than Mrs. Toogood for a too attractive practice of liberality, though expostulations could only have been very partially called for, and many an excellent lady was no more blameable than the witch of other days, who had the misfortune to be responsible for the murrain amongst the cattle.

Nevertheless, there was a prospect of rough play, and not much prospect of its being very discriminative, and there was no prospect at all of any effectual restraint. The yeomanry were only formidable enough to excite provocation, though they were drawn up with great military skill before the opening of Cheek's lane, to secure a safe retreat. The specials were equally provident on the side of the green next to the village, with one foot ready for an onset, and the other for a run, whilst the enemy were roaring defiance and laughter, and warning both forces to keep their distance by flourishing their cudgels and quart pots.

As Crowley and Tom made their way to that part of the green where Cheek would enter on his new

dominions, they saw nothing but a disposition to good-humour, though they doubted whether it was not too good, and rather trembled for so much hilarity. They were not long kept in suspense—a high wind swept the road in the direction from the railway-station at which the new squire was to harness a splendid carriage and four, which he was said to have purchased in one lot of a job-master, that he might make his entrée in becoming equipage. First came a cloud of dust, like the hurricane of a battle-field; then was heard the rapid roll of wheels and the crack of postillions' whips; and then dashed along an open barouche and four smoking gallopers, with job-master's liveries in the rumble and a solitary magnifico inside, reclining in scarlet and tiger-skins. It was, indeed, Christopher Cheek, Esquire—the monarch of all he surveyed! As he whirled past, he honoured his amazed admirers with a haughty stare, which meant to say, “What do you think of me now?” But, of course, he could stoop to no recognition, and diminished down the road at a rate which threatened every wheel, spring, knee, and neck of the stupendous turn-out!

But what was the welcome? We have since those days heard a monster bravura at the Crystal Palace, which was very stunning; and have witnessed Easter Monday at Epping, which was very dangerous; and have likewise bobbed our heads at Wimbledon, which was, perhaps, very lucky: but such wild howls, and such a frantic chase, and such a deadly precision of missiles as those which enlivened

Mr. Cheek's cavalcade, never frightened us before. Happy is the fact that curses cannot kill, that four legs are faster than two, that nest-eggs have not the range of rifles, or Squire Cheek's history must have ended in a monument on Goose Green.

As he turned round over the bridge, with the two near wheels grazing the parapet, and the two off ones spinning in the air; and, at every sharp angle and inequality of the road—wherever there was a safe place of ambush for his friends of the Rokins' light-infantry to pour in a close broadside, or follow him, or meet him with a raking volley, or frighten his plungers upright with frying-pans and cow-horns, and the screams of Mrs. Crimp's "virtuous young women"—there was a fresh volume of skirmishers, till he vanished through the lodge-entrance of the Chase with marks of admiration enough in his person and panels to satisfy the most craving ambition.

It was a great commotion, but it was not over yet; for the sport had been too short to repay the long waiting for it, and the public spirit was warmed up for something more. It cast its eyes upon Captain Drinkwater and the specials, who were there to keep them in order. Mobs, with their blood up, seldom like to be kept in order; and so, from casting their eyes, they proceeded to cast their remaining stores of ammunition. The attack being kept up some time, the Captain waxed valiant, and threatened a charge; which, being answered with roars of laughter, his dignity compelled him to face

about and give the word. But the mob stood its ground ; and, though the prudent officer gave it full time for a run, prepared, in military phrase, “to receive cavalry.” In the onset, the leader’s charger had the mishap to receive a turnip on his muzzle, and, shying sharply round, dashed through his followers with a determination which nothing could restrain, though the rider was too experienced a horseman to be canted off, so long as he had a spur to hang by. The Force was too brave to desert their commander under any circumstances, and so they followed him, full-speed, to the farthest end of Goose Green, where they again took up position and returned the huzzas of defiance. The Specials, at the same time, retreated upon the public-house ; and, all being out of range of the enemy, a dispatch was sent, at utmost speed, for reinforcements, to a recruiting-sergeant in the next village, and hostilities were suspended. Mob, satisfied with its glory, huzzaed and got drunk till it grew dark, and then resolved to make an uproarious night of it.

Being unwilling to leave his aunt during a night of perhaps alarming riot, Crowley sent a messenger to say he should go to the Rosary to sleep, and rode home with Tom to put up his horse and dine. But he had promised to return to Goldsworthy, and it was necessary to send another messenger there to account for his absence. For this office, Tom seemed to be inclined himself, as it was long since he had seen pretty Polly, and he thought nobody could do it so well. It was, therefore, soon agreed that he

should take advantage of the opportunity, provided he allowed Crowley to bear him company on foot over some distance of rough ground which interrupted a short cut to the public road; for it had now become very dark, and somewhat hazardous for a horseman.

After a long stoppage they set out, Crowley walking in advance to feel the way and take the first chance of the stumbles, and neither of them very apprehensive for his bones, of which their hunting habits had left them small consideration. Other persons might, perhaps, have thought of other dangers in such a night and such a state of the country; and, whilst we are writing these lines by a safe fireside in the very forest we are describing, and with just such another night howling outside the window, we think it highly probable we should have been of the party.

CHAPTER II.

WE are sensible of having too long neglected Mrs. Bloomer, and must now report what had occurred during her period of eclipse.

Jim Crow's convalescence, we are concerned to say, was retarded almost as much as the Vicar's, and was the cause of more anxiety, inasmuch as the wives of his bosom took much after the example of Mrs. Bloomer herself, and were in the habit of shifting their perch and hopping after every handsome young stranger that enlivened their vicinity. Indignant at this lax behaviour, and conscious that most of the cottagers on the Green would, in another year, make as good a display as herself at the Poultry Show, Mrs. Bloomer had set forth, one dark night, to beat the bushes for Mr. Crow's erring establishment, and bring them home upside down by their contumacious heels.

The search had led her some distance, but all to no purpose till she found herself in the confines of Mr. Cheek's orchard. Here she thought she would make a scrutiny amongst the apple-trees, and passed

from one to another until she came to the verge of the farm-yard. Perhaps the ill-conducted harem might have gone to a party there, and arranged to pass the night upon the cribs and haystacks; and so into the yard she plunged, without pausing to consider whether there was any bottom to it. Finding a very good one not more than knee deep, she was proceeding onward when her progress was arrested by a light which streamed through a chink in the barn. What could it be, so late at night? It was not the light of any one on a search like her own, for it was quite stationary; it could not have been left by accident, for Mr. Cheek was too careful of his property—unless, indeed, he had left it to set the place on fire, and come upon the Insurance Office—he was quite bad enough. The entrance door was round a corner, and she could take a peep through the chink in her front without fear of detection. There was something in that last word which roused up all her animosities. If she could only catch Cheek in a felony, would she not make him remember it!

Having, previous to her plunge, turned the lower extremity of her dress through her pocket holes, she was not long in wading to the glimmer, to which she stooped with a rather comical liberality of exhibition to those who might have chanced to stand behind. What did she see?

On the floor of the barn, which was strewed with chaff and rubbish, and had been roughly patched from time to time, as the rats' holes made

it necessary, sat Mr. Cheek at a distance of four or five yards from her. His legs were stretched out, and between them was a tin box, like the cases in which lawyers keep their deeds, which brightly reflected the light of a dull tallow candle on one side, also gleaming on a strong wrenching iron on the other. He was intent upon the examination of several papers, and debating with himself whether he should destroy or preserve them.

“Humph! Dangerous!” he muttered. “But may be useful some day.” With which he carefully replaced them in the box, and took out others, over which he glanced; pausing over them with the same doubtful shake of the head, and ending by restoring them to their places.

“Nobody will think of looking for them here,” he again growled, locking the box, and on his hands and knees, sweeping a clear space upon the boards. He had next recourse to his wrenching iron; and, inserting it under a short plank or two, forced them up with as little noise as possible, and dug out as much rubbish as would leave accommodation for the insertion of his treasure; which he then consigned to earth with as much care as he would have bestowed on the coffin of a dear friend, whose repose might be menaced by resurrection men. Having done this to his mind, he replaced the boards and pushed the nails down in their old sockets, without the noisy aid of a hammer. After which, he rose to his feet and looked suspiciously around him, as if he feared the motions of his own black shadow, and

kicked about the chaff and removed the surplus earth till no trace of his operations was distinguishable. He then took his candle in one hand and his wrench in the other, and moved to the door ; before opening which, he extinguished the light, and Mrs. Bloomer saw no more. It was enough she thought for a beginning. She had detected her enemy in something nefarious ; and, though as yet she knew not what it was, she had a strong opinion that he had best take care of himself.

We have nothing more particular to relate of her till the day of Cheek's grand return, except that she found a point in her own ground from which there was a good view of the barn without incurring a repetition of her late hazards. Night after night she had been punctual to her post, and no light had been seen, but the exhumation of the tin box must, she knew, take place some time or other, and the chief object of her life was to make one at the ceremony.

So engrossed was the uncomportable nature of Mrs. Bloomer on this subject that she had not leisure to be alarmed at the threatening demonstration on the green. It was the preparation for Mr. Cheek ; and she felt convinced that, having now become the mighty man of the village, he would cease to reside at his farm, and that one of the first things for removal would be his secreted treasure. Before he thundered past the Vicarage she had spent many restless hours on the look out ; and being gratified by the sight of him, her impatience increased with

the advance of night, which cheered her with a lowering look and a bustle amongst the clouds indicative of much less danger in approaching her chink. In this fidget she continued till she could distinguish nothing but the tops of the elm trees, which had begun to swing their limbs about with much violence, and hear nothing else but the wild cries of the invisible crowds in various quarters, mingled with the cracked church bells, which Cheek had sent half-a-crown's worth of his labourers to swing out of their senses, sometimes in whispers and sometimes in exclamations, to the great discomposure of the rooks and jackdaws. Captain Drinkwater's word of command had long been silent, for he and his bold dragoons had, of course, clanked away to supper, under the very sensible conviction that when they could not see the enemy it was of no use to look for him ; and the specials were probably gone also, for who could see sense in running risks when they could not see to run away ?

It was about ten o'clock when Mrs. Bloomer, who had been constantly changing her station from the front to the back of her premises, each of which was bounded by a pathway, was shivering in the cold blast by the hedge which divided her from the fields. For a long time she shivered without any event to quicken her warmer currents ; but, at last, a momentary lull of the gust enabled her to distinguish a heavy footstep approaching in a direct line from the Chase to the farm. It was very near before she heard it ; and in another second it passed

close under her eyes, with nothing but the hedge between. Her eyes, however, were of no use to her, for it was too dark to see her hand. It was Cheek, no doubt, and she stole after him to her old look-out, where she panted for some minutes, like some Broome Warren innocent in expectation of her first rendezvous; and then once more streamed the thin red ray through the weather-worn boards! Her perseverance was going to be rewarded! And through the gap she went into the low orchard, feeling the apple-trees till her nails scratched against the broken paling of the farm-yard. This was small impediment, for we are speaking of a happy time before the revival of crinoline or train, and Mrs. Bloomer's chicken hunting evolutions had made her as active as a cat. And now she fairly stood in the enemy's camp, with a full knowledge of the penalties of a spy; but with too much mischief in view to dread their infliction.

Taking her old station, there she saw the lord of Broome Warren looking warily about him, leaning on his crowbar with one hand, and sailing his tallow candle up and down, and round and round him, to see if any rat, cat, or other intruder was looking at him. He was accoutred very differently from his fashion of former days, and, as he judged, comfortably to his present position. His overcoat was trimmed with velvet, and lined with fur; his chest exhibited a double chain of gold, mosaic or pinchbeck, and on his head he wore one of those dignified coverings called a Baronet: but nevertheless he

looked for some time a little irresolute, and not very unlike a house-breaker. At length he laid down his light, and began to prize up the floor.

He had not been five minutes at work before he had real cause to be startled, and so had his looker on, for the barn door was swung open as if the storm had burst through, and a tall, bony, gipsy-like man, with closely cropped hair, and scarcely any clothes, strode in as we might suppose a bull to enter the arena. Cheek snatched up his crow to a posture of defence, and staggered three or four paces back, with a loud convulsive demand of who he was, and what he wanted.

“I hope I see your worship well!” said a deep and too well-remembered voice. “Have you forgotten Aaron Daunt?”

“Aaron!—Aaron! They told me you were drowned!”

“You did not hope so,” replied the man, with a hollow and bitter laugh. “It was like enough I should be drowned, for I had weighty matters to sink me!”

“Where do you come from?”

“From three of the four elements. First, from the air, out of a jail window; next, from a visit to the bottom of Lympton river; and last, from the deepest dens of the forest, where I have been dodging bloodhounds, till I am driven to seek a better hiding-place.”

“Have you been in the house?”

“Aye.”

“ Did you see the old woman ?”

“ She was asleep, up the chimney.”

“ I am glad of it—glad for your sake. You will be followed !”

“ Give me that iron, and let them follow.”

“ There were two of you. Where is Bunckle ?”

“ I could not stay for him. He limps behind, and I don’t want him; he has not heart enough, and I have something to do where I cannot trust him.”

“ But what is this I heard about Cox ?”

“ Only that I have killed him.”

“ So it is reported. Killed him ? How ?”

“ Dashed him to smash against the prison wall !”

Cheek enquired a great deal more, and with frightful earnestness, but the wind had grown louder, and the rafters shuddered with a rumble like thunder. Mrs. Bloomer could hear nothing else for a few moments.

The next words she distinguished were :

“ Don’t be afraid. These riots in the village will divert suspicion, safe enough. Besides, your life is forfeited already if they catch you. If you mean to send him after Cox, now’s your time, and here’s plenty of money ready to help you off whenever you please.”

“ But where is he ?”

“ Staying with his old aunt, Mrs. Toogood. I saw him this afternoon.”

The conversation was again interrupted, but con-

tinued very earnestly, till Cheek's gesture appeared to say he was going to fetch something, and then he went out. The light remained, and, as Aaron glared around him, his eye fell upon the wrenching-iron, and the half-raised boards. He approached and looked under them, and then at the door; but, either he was in no mood to be curious, or heard Cheek returning, for he resumed the place and the attitude in which he had been left.

"Here," said Cheek, carrying a double-barrelled gun. "There it is; I always keep it loaded with a brace of bullets, in case of thieves."

Aaron tried it to his shoulder, and carefully examined the caps. "That will do," he muttered, and something more, but the wind grew more boisterous, and only an occasional word could be heard, when, whiz! out went the flaring candle, and Mrs. Bloomer's eyes were as hopeless as her ears. Hopeless, indeed, was all the rest of her, for in that instant a pair of unseen arms were folded round her throat, and squeezed out a shriek that might have frightened an engine-driver!

Aaron and Cheek stood perfectly still and silent. The spectre or murderer, or whatever he might be, clenched her in a tighter embrace.

"A woman!" he whispered. "Be quiet and hold your tongue, or we shall have our throats cut!" whereupon Mrs. Bloomer's next paroxysm was reduced to a gasp.

"What could that have been?" asked Cheek, relighting his candle with a lucifer, and almost as

much out of his wits as his two eaves-droppers.

“Hush!” answered Aaron, who was not of a discomposable nature, “we may hear it again,” and they stood listening.

“Not a word, as you hope for life!” whispered the spectre, with his very unspectre-like grasp removed to the lady’s waist, and, as she *did* want to live, not a word did she say.

“Who and what are you, and what are you doing here?” he continued, in the same scarce audible tone.

“I don’t know. I can’t tell whether I am dead or alive! What are *you*, and what are you going to do with me?”

“Keep you quiet, if I can.”

“Kill me?”

“No, nor eat you neither. I saw this light, and came for a look through, and so I suppose did you; so let’s be friends, my beauty, and peep together.”

It was no time to be fastidious; and with another scarce articulated injunction to silence, they pressed their cheeks close together, with each an eye through that terrible peep-hole. The two in the barn were still listening.

“I think it must have been some rusty hinge in the hog styte,” said Cheek.

“That or some old screech-owl attracted by the light through the crannies. Let us have a look.” And Aaron stepped straight to the two pair of eyes that were staring at him. The Commodore, for he

it was, tripped up his partner and crouched beside her, whilst Aaron put his fingers through the aperture, within a couple of feet of them.

"I thought so!" he said. "Don't you know birds always fly to the light, and can't you mend your boards till an old owl comes to tell you?"

The voice retreated, and again the eyes were in their place, and then came another calm, in which Cheek was heard to say—

"Set fire to old mother Toogood's haystack. It is sure to bring him out, but mind you don't miss him. That gun carries a bullet point blank for a hundred yards."

"Make yourself easy. He shall never send another man to prison."

Mrs. Bloomer's friend gave her a closer hug. "Did you hear that? Be off, old woman. They are coming out. Which is the way to find Mr. Crowley?"

"Through the gate and over the bridge, and then straight. You'll see the lights of the house."

"Then take care of yourself and away with you. If we lose a minute we shall have murder."

The Commodore, who had really a few good points, had not forgotten Crowley's compassion both to himself and his family, and floundered away with the splash of some marine creature that had got ashore by accident. His guide, with her dress again tucked through her pocket-holes, scuttled away with him under bare poles till they reached the green, and then again pointing out his road, streamed

off before the wind ; not in a line for the Vicarage, but straight for the Longland Arms, in which there was a light still flickering. What her purpose was will appear ere long.

Bunckle spun along to the Rosary as if the ‘Cockle Shell’ were again flying from the ‘Kitty-wake,’ but in his hurry and his panic and the great darkness, he more than once got out of his reckoning, and then got worse for fear Aaron should out-sail him. But on he struggled, blown and exhausted, till he butted his head against Mrs. Toogood’s lodge gates. The old man and woman there had seen nothing of young master ; and so on he struggled again till he scrambled his way to the hall-door, where he found a bell, at which he tugged as if he had recovered his own main-sheet. All the domestics and Mrs. Toogood herself, expecting nothing less than the rioters, rushed out together to know what was the matter.

“Where’s Mr. Crowley ?” he shouted. “I don’t see him here ! Where is he ?”

“Mr. Crowley !” cried the amazed lady. “What does he mean ? What uproar is this ?”

“What signifies what ? Where is he, I say ?”

“Is the man mad ? My nephew is coming here to sleep, but has not arrived !”

“Then tell me where to find him,” and make haste !”

Never was such confusion ! Nobody knew !

“Then, if I don’t catch him in time, he’s mur-

dered—that's all!" And away he plunged, before another question could be asked.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed all the old household in chorus. "We always said how it would be! We always said no good would come of encouraging such people! It has made them everything that's dreadful, and now they've gone and murdered Master James! Oh, dear, ma'am! Oh, mercy, ma'am! Oh, pray, ma'am, don't do so no more; for, as sure as you live, you'll be the next yourself!"

With what strain of wisdom, Mrs. Toogood, this time, brought them all to their senses, and herself too, or whether she ever became wise again, we have no note till we examine farther into our materials.

Crowley had seen Tom a good distance on his way, and was returning to keep his engagement with his aunt, by what he believed to be short cuts. The darkness soon caused him to lose himself, and it was nearly two hours before he stepped into a path which appeared to lead in the right direction. After pursuing this for some time, he stopped to make sure of his geography, and satisfied himself that he was about half a mile at the back of the Rosary. In the momentary halt the wind conveyed the sound of a footstep, meeting him at a long striding pace, which was heavy enough and rapid enough to run him down. Fearing a collision, he turned out of the path, and almost at the same instant, a tall dark figure brushed before the blast, and was immediately lost to hearing. That fellow,

he thought, seems to know his way better than I do, and to be running from some rascality. It must be past midnight, and country folks are seldom out at that hour for any good.

He resumed his walk with a better prospect of getting to the end of it, for there were now some red indications above the horizon of a stormy moon-rise. His track was down a hill side, at the bottom of which were Mrs. Toogood's meadows, and a lane, leading to the house, so down he pursued his way. The farther he went, the brighter grew the moon—if moon it was—which was now becoming doubtful. There was a hill on the other side of it, which could not be behind the moon: and now there was a red gleam with a copper-coloured halo round it! What could it be? He stopped to look more intently, and then a bright flame broke out. It was something on fire. A lime-kiln perhaps, or charcoal burning. Presently the flame darted upward till it caught the line of the wind, and then streamed horizontally in fierce and pointed undulations. It was neither lime-kiln nor charcoal burning, but something more unusual. Suddenly his pulse began to beat an alarm. Was the house on fire? No; the increasing flame was reflected on the white walls at two or three hundred yards' distance. Mrs. Toogood had talked of her fine hay harvest; such a noble rick; such a feast for her pretty Alderneys, her fine sleek punchy carriage horses; but not to be cut till Christmas! Better she had cut it a little sooner, for not a blade would they get; horses or

cows. It was now a flaring furnace ! In such a hurricane, not all the water in the county could have put it out. So there he stood transfixed ; as bright an object on that hill-side as if he had been on fire himself.

He had not stood long before he was perceived by another spectator. Some one was scrambling up towards him, making frantic signs ! Who could this be ? Whoever he was he cared very little for his neck. As he approached he began to shout—

“ Down, Mr. Crowley ! Down amongst the bushes ! Down, I say ! Down !”

By all that was strange, it was the voice and figure of the creature he had committed to prison ! the real and undrowned porosity of Commodore Bunckle ; who, in another moment, dashed up to him, and, too breathless to speak another word, pulled him with all his force behind the screen of broom.

Crowley seized him by the collar. “ So, Commodore, I have got you for the third time ! Are you crazed ? What is the matter ?”

“ By and bye !” panted Bunckle, pushing his head through the bushes for a better survey, “ I was just in time !”

“ In time for what ?”

“ Never mind. Lie still.” He was quivering all over from his rapid exertions, but never turned his eyes from their search.

“ I saw him run away from the stack ; but which way is he gone ?”

“ Which way is who gone ?”

“ Don’t interrupt me. He is not far off.”

“ Only tell me—”

“ Hush. Have you seen anybody ?”

“ Somebody ran past me a few minutes ago ; but I could not see him.”

“ Nor he you ; or else—but he must have seen you just now. I don’t think he could have seen me, for I came up the water-course.”

“ But all this time—”

“ Presently. Look to the right yonder, where the light shines but dimly, Do you see a small opening in the hill ?”

“ I can just see it.”

“ Keep your eye upon it. If that was he you met, he was taking a round to be out of the way till you came to see the mischief, for the path brings him back, just where you are looking.”

Crowley saw it was useless to ask questions, and did as he was told ; and thus they kept silent watch for another minute or two, when he placed his hand upon Bunckle’s shoulder, and pointed to the opening.

“ There’s a gleam,” he said, “ upon something like the stem of a bush ; only it appears to be moving along.”

“ Hey,” replied the other, quickly catching sight of the object. “ Do you know what that is ? It is just what we are looking for. The reflection on a gun barrel. He is trying to get behind for a fair shot!”

"A shot ? and who is he ?"

"Who ? Why, that born devil, Aaron Daunt !"

The fact was now more credible. Aaron was the man he wanted ! "Getting behind me, is he ? Then we'll try and get behind him. He's too far off to be dangerous just yet. Take my hat and cloak, and walk slowly down the hill. Don't show too much of yourself, or he'll not follow ; and he shall find me where he does not expect me."

"I see, sir, you mean to lay the first hand upon him ; but, mind you, he's as strong as a horse. That stack was fired in the hope of bringing you out, and designed to be the light by which he meant to shoot you."

"So ! Will you give me your promise to keep out of distance ?"

"Aye, sir ; but not too far to help you to grapple with him."

"Then here are hat and cloak." And Crowley pulled them off as he lay on the ground, and Bunckle was transformed into something which, only half seen and blown about by the wind, might serve for a decoy. "Now go to yonder point ; and, after you have shown yourself, hide safely behind it."

"Be sure, sir, you keep him between you and the light. He must be close upon us !"

"Never fear me." And they took their different ways. The Commodore rising into the full glare, and walking composedly to a gravelly ridge, which intersected the broom with a bright fiery streak

After having leisurely shown himself, he sat down, just visible enough to mark where he was. It was a hazardous moment; for, though they were two to one, the gun, in skilful hands, would make terrible odds.

Crowley's progress amongst the tangled undulations was cautious and quick. Sometimes at a stop for examination, and sometimes at a run, lest the gun should get too near his representative. His half circuit ended at the place where he had seen it. But it was no longer there. It must have passed on towards the Commodore, and he hurried straight in the same direction, discarding his caution, because he was now going in the teeth of the wind, with the red reflection upon every fibre in front. Nothing was visible. The man must have lain down, or was crawling snake fashion. His pursuer might pass him or tumble over him; in the latter case, so much the better; and Crowley kept on at speed till he came within fifty yards of his comrade. What was his horror when he saw poor Bunckle's head clearly above the line of gravel, as bright as a solar lamp, against a black bunch of bushes, and, at the same glimpse, a motion in those before him which showed something advancing beneath them, at least twenty yards in advance. Had it been possible to make himself heard, he would have called out. A few desperate leaps brought him close enough to the lurker to see him in the act of taking aim! He was too late! The shot was fired, and the head dropped! Quick as

the shot itself, the assassin bounded up to escape ; but he met his follower and his match ; for Crowley knocked him from his legs with a blow that might have come from another bullet. Unluckily the force of his own impetus carried him a step down the incline of the hill, and when he recovered himself it was only to see his antagonist vanish in the darkness. He was taking the first step in pursuit when he was seized by the arm.

“ It is of no use, Mr. Crowley,” cried a voice which he thought must have come from the dead. “ He has another barrel ready, and you shall not follow him ! ”

The second astonishment was greater than the first. The Commodore was not dead. He had never been more alive. The hat had a bullet through it, sure enough, but not so the head, which had providentially found a substitute in the top of a stick.

“ Sit down, Mr. Crowley, and give him time to get out of the neighbourhood. He thinks you are done for, and will take care not to come back here ; but, if he sees you again, he’ll make another trial.” The exhausted Mr. Bunckle then threw himself upon the ground.

“ If this is liberty I’ve had enough of it, and you may send me back to prison as soon as you like. Yes, to be hanged for Daunt’s murder of Captain Cox.”

“ You deceive yourself,” said Crowley ; “ Cox only

received a few bruises, and is better than he deserves to be."

"The Lord be praised!" exclaimed Bunckle, starting quite as much as he had done at the shot.
"The jailer told us he was dead!"

"He told you falsely. But how is it that I see you here? Fear nothing from me, for no duty can oblige me to send a man to prison who has just saved my life."

"May Heaven preserve it for many a year; for I owe you no grudge, sir. You only did what was right, and you did it as kindly as you could, and you befriended my poor children."

"Will you promise to be present at the trial of Captain Cox?"

"I will, as I hope to be saved."

"But where will you hide yourself in the meantime?"

"I have written to my girl, Nelly, to meet me in the forest where she knows I used to hide my kegs when I supplied this part of the country; and she will see you and always tell you where I may be found. But now, sir, I have something else to tell you." And therewith he described all that he had heard and seen in Cheek's barn; with the addition that he had a witness in an old woman, who, he believed, was the same for whom his boy Tom had minded the ducks.

"Mrs. Bloomer?"

"That's she! And she ran straight off to the public-house, where she expected to find the other beaks, and get a warrant."

"Then go where you will. You must not be seen there, but I must. Keep faith with me and say no more."

As they rose to take their separate ways, Crowley almost put his hand upon a piece of evidence against Cheek which proved of considerable value. It was the gun from which the shot had been fired. The knock-down blow had caused Aaron to drop it; and, scared by the deed he had done, and the sudden attack upon him, he had not had presence of mind to pick it up. The glare of the hay-stack was enough to show that it bore a silver crest upon the stock, and it was the crest of Sir Harry Longland.

CHAPTER III.

WE now attend Mrs. Bloomer in her abrupt incursion upon their Worships, who had been all day, and had made up their minds to be all night, consulting in their Petty Sessions room at the Longland Arms ; though it happened, as it often does at such meetings, that the more they consulted the less they did ; for they had no more specials to swear in, and had speechified each other into a state of drowsiness which was not very surprising. In this state they were when the terrified and breathless Mrs. Bloomer rushed in, screaming for a warrant against the abominable and murderous Mr. Cheek. Their Worships started up with a full conviction that it was all over with them, and that the rabble had thrown amongst them a volley of hand grenades ; and perhaps they might have been excused for a few exclamations more natural than magisterial. But, seeing the alarmist followed in by three or four of the rural police, they dropped back into their seats and stared as if their terror had been nothing but the explosion of insulted dignity.

Sir Hector Stonycross, who always sallied from his citadel on the first temptation of a broken head, thundered his demand of who the mad woman was and what she wanted ; but it was only by guesses founded on a clamour about Mr. Crowley and murder, and Mr. Cheek and hay-stacks and blunderbusses, that they made out something like her meaning. With some trouble they succeeded in arriving at sufficient particulars to bless their hearts and souls, and scratch out a hasty warrant for Christopher Cheek, of Broome Warren Chase, Esquire ; which being the first occasion on which he had been honoured with that address, was a rather ominous beginning to his course of distinction. The constables were directed to use all dispatch, and Mrs. Bloomer volunteered to guide them.

After about twenty minutes of doubt and dismay, a tramp was heard at the inn door, and a voice in great exasperation, denouncing vengeance against all law and all warrants, and all magistrates, and more particularly the blunder-heads of Broome Warren ; and then the room door was burst open, and in stamped Christopher Cheek, Esquire.

“ Now, sergeant, where did you take the prisoner ? Relate the particulars.”

“ Please your Worship, we took him in his own barn ; but first the witness Bloomer guided us to a hole in the boarding to see what he was about.”

“ To see what he was about,” repeated Sir Hector, writing down the evidence. “ And what did you see ?”

“ We saw two persons in very eager conversation ; one of whom was the prisoner ; the other was a tall, rough-looking man, one of those who lately escaped from Lympton jail, and the same your Worship committed for the possession of stolen letters.”

“ And what business had these fellows to be peeping about my premises ?” vociferated Squire Cheek. “ I should have been justified in shooting them for housebreakers.”

“ Prisoner, you will be allowed to say what you please presently. You saw two persons in eager conversation. Did you hear what they said ?”

“ Not all, Sir Hector, for the wind was very high, but I distinctly heard Cheek——”

“ Fellow ! whom do you mean by Cheek ?”

“ Pay no attention, serjeant. What did you hear him say ?”

“ I heard him ask the other whether he was sure the shot had taken effect.”

“ It’s a lie !—a conspiracy got up amongst you all !”

“ Whether the shot had taken effect. Did the other make any answer ?”

“ He said it had gone clean through the man’s head, but he had not had time to examine, because he was attacked by another party, and was obliged to go off without his gun.”

“ Without his gun. Go on.”

“ The prisoner said that was a bad job, and might lead to detection. He must go back and look for it.”

Cheek, finding that interruption was of no avail, confined himself to ejaculations, while Sir Hector continued to write, and asked "What else?"

"There was some talk about the burning of Mrs. Toogood's haystack, and the prisoner said the other had done it very well, only he wished he had burnt the old woman on the top of it, and then, to prevent the man from going off in search of the gun, I thought it time to break in upon them; but I'm sorry to say the door was barred within, and whilst we were breaking in he contrived to break out."

"I corroborate every word of it!" cried Mrs. Bloomer.

"Hold your tongue, ma'am, till you are wanted. Now, prisoner, if you have anything to ask the witness, now is your time."

"I should think I know that as well as you do," returned Cheek. "Now, you constable, how long have you known this Bloomer woman?"

"I have known Mrs. Bloomer since she complained to me that you had stolen her game cock."

"And what was the nature of your acquaintance?"

"I was requested to watch the premises."

"And you were often there in the night?"

"Very often."

"And I suppose you sometimes saw Mrs. Bloomer?"

"I did."

"Was her husband at home?"

"I believe not."

"Now, mind, you are on your oath.—You were sometimes asked in?"

"I was not."

"Then where did you see her."

"Looking about for her stray chicken."

"Now, answer me.—Were you not one of those chickens yourself?"

Mrs. Bloomer shrieked out, "Oh! goodness, gracious me! What does the man mean?"

"Hold your tongue, ma'am! Don't swear, ma'am, or I shall fine you five shillings. Keep to the point, prisoner; these questions are irrelevant."

"I say they are not. I am proving a collusion."

"You are suggesting a slander, and I'll not allow it."

"Well done, Sir Hector!"

"Hold your tongue, ma'am."

"Oh, gracious!"

"Fine Mrs. Bloomer five shillings. Are there any other constables to corroborate the sergeant?"

Three more stepped forward.

"Now, prisoner, will you prove a collusion with all four?"

"Yes, and with you too, if you won't stun us. I see how it is! Here's a plot amongst all of you, and I feel it beneath my station to say another word."

"Swear Mrs. Bloomer. Now, ma'am, your tongue is at liberty; but, remember, we want to understand you, and if we don't it may be our duty to discharge the prisoner."

The caution was magical. Mrs. Bloomer would rather never have spoken again.

"Now, witness, you told us something about peeping through a hole in the prisoner's barn?"

Witness had "told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help ——"

"Never mind, ma'am, you needn't swear any more; you have been fined five shillings already. What caused you to peep?"

She had begun to peep a long time ago.

"What caused you then?"

She had been looking for some chickens one dark night, and had seen a light in the barn, and that caused her to peep.

"And what did you see?"

She saw enough to make her peep ever since. The prisoner was examining papers from a large tin box, and muttered to himself that they were dangerous, and then he buried them under the flooring. She showed the constables exactly where it was.

"Place it on the table."

Cheek grinned in derision. "Aye, place it on the table."

The serjeant again stepped forward. "Please, your worship, we have not been able to bring it. The moment the prisoner saw Mrs. Bloomer point to the spot where some flooring had been prized up he threw his candle into a large collection of barn rubbish piled about it, and swore we should only search his premises at the cost of our lives.

We were compelled to escape as fast as we could, and the box is no doubt consumed."

"Make haste, and try again. That box must be worth all the rest of the evidence. He would not else have burnt his premises for it."

Several constables started off, Mrs. Bloomer again showing them the way.

Cheek's merriment increased to a fierce laugh at the absurd invention of any box at all, and he was violently asserting that such a falsehood betrayed the whole conspiracy, when a sudden hurra arose among the crowd outside, and prepared their worships for a new event, which was nothing less than the very surprising appearance of Crowley himself.

"There," shouted Cheek, amid the general rejoicing, "There is the man I have murdered ! What do you all say now ?"

But his exultation was suddenly stopped by the sight of his own gun.

Crowley's statement was very short, describing merely what had happened to him, with the exhibition of the gun, just as he had picked it up, with one hammer down on the barrel discharged, and the other barrel loaded. This, taken in connection with the perforated hat, was something staggering, and Cheek began to feel himself in a serious predicament, especially when the man who had made the attempt was identified with Aaron, and the Commodore promised as a witness at the Assizes.

"Now, prisoner, ask Mr. Crowley what questions you please."

But Cheek was brought to a stand; for he knew the ownership of the gun could be proved beyond dispute, and had no questions to ask. He was so much confused that he forgot how far he was in the power of Aaron, of whom he now very desperately endeavoured to make a scapegoat. He had employed that man, he said, out of charity, and had been horrified to hear of his committal on a theft, and his murder of a fellow prisoner. Was he not just the man to do a similar deed on Mr. Crowley, who had apprehended him? He had suspected him of stealing the gun long ago, and very ardently hoped he would be convicted. Alas! Mr. Cheek never reflected that when the garrison is weak we only defend one point by exposing a great many others, of which he was destined ere long to see the truth, for amongst his auditors was one who took dangerous notes of every word he said.

Being asked what he had to say why he should not be sent for trial, he had, of course, a great deal to say; but, as it was all confined to paroxysms of fury, it amounted to nothing, and Sir Hector made the final harangue and the commitment according to established forms, that is to say, for a conspiracy to kill, slay, and destroy one James Crowley, of Oakendl House, in this county, by the perforation of the said Crowley's hat with a deadly missile called a bullet, under the belief that the said Crowley's head

was in the said hat, then and there, and not in any other part of His Majesty's dominions. A post-chaise and two mounted police, with two more inside, were then ordered out, and presently Christopher Cheek, Esquire, of Broome Warren Chase, was trotted off to those unpleasant quarters to which it has already been our lot to consign three of his acquaintance.

The evil spirit of Cheek might almost be said to go off in a flash of fire, for he was lighted out of the village by a blaze from both his farm and his mansion. It turned out that the first had scarcely flared up when it seemed to illuminate fiercer memories of long and cruel oppressions in the lookers on, who suddenly took the same view of the public disorder which Cheek himself had taken in reference to Mrs. Toogood's haystack, the destruction of which, he had represented to Aaron, would naturally be attributed to the mob of strangers. There would never be such another opportunity for paying off old scores. To Green Lane's end, therefore, streamed the tide of discord, and, after a rapid clearing of the live stock, which consisted of old Nanny, up went the flames as fast as a general rottenness could carry them. Very soon the floor tumbled in, and very soon afterwards the roof followed suit, and sent its hurricane of sparks dancing in the blast, amid yells and screams which apprised Captain Drinkwater that his immortality could be deferred no longer, more particularly as the reinforcements which had been sent for after the first contest now marched up,

half-a-dozen strong, inspired by the martial music of drum and fife, and led by Serjeant Anak.

The Royal Regiment of Goose Green had been drawn up in compact form, ever since the repulse, before the ale-house door, and had well qualified themselves for battle when their bold commander gave the word for action.

“And then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And mounting in hot haste.”

One dauntless dragoon gave his burly comrade a leg up, and two made a hoist for the same stirrup, and a third seized the reins of his right hand man, and flogged up the charger of his left, and their leader thought of Waterloo, and pointed out the countless black legions against the fiery background.

“Lieutenant Choke,” was his last direction—for such was the rank of our friend the apothecary—“If I fall you are the next in command—Char-r-ge!”

And, alas! he did fall; for on the other side of the hedge which confined Cheek’s lane was a broad, black ditch which served as a channel for the muck to the village stream. Over this the fated captain checked his charger to crane, and, in that brief period of existence which is commonly called no time, not a vestige of him was to be seen above ground or water but his boots and spurs. The next in command screamed “Halt! He’ll be smothered! The enemy is retreating! Give them a volley over

their heads for fear they come back, and pull him out by the spurs!"

It is a great mortification to have raised the hopes of the Muse, and found her so little to sing about; and the only excuse we can plead is that such is very often the case with greater geniuses. Truth obliges us to say that the battle of Goose Green concluded with the beginning; for no sooner was heard the ear-piercing fife of the regulars, than every hob-nail felt a loadstone in the heart that had set off before it, and the fall of Drinkwater in the arms of Victory is all we have to record.

The volley over their heads was carried by the wind in greatly augmented reports to the Rosary, where, of course they were multiplied a hundred per cent., and a great deal more.

"Oh, criminy!" cried Miss Betsy, "the battle has begun. Hadn't we better send for a few soldiers?" for the messenger who had gone for them had returned that way to give the glad tidings of relief, and restore his energies.

"Yes, ma'am, yes," puffed the fat butler. "It's a raging! I always said how it would be!"

"What's to be done? where shall we fly? will nobody advise?" deplored our bankrupt Minerva.

"It's too late, ma'am!" panted the corpulent footman. "There's at least a hundred thousand of 'em, but the young man from the Grannydears is taking his supper, and I'll send him for the baggy-nets!"

We cannot wonder if, on a night when really

"The De'il had business on his hand,"

Crowley forgot all about his engagement to his aunt, whom he now knew to be in no danger of molestation. He had no desire to help everybody in doing nothing, and there was not a soul he could trust for better service. He had quickly perceived, from what he heard of the evidence previous to his arrival, and of Cheek's injunction to Aaron, that the only place where he had a chance of falling in with his would-be assassin was where he had lost his weapon. To that spot, therefore, he risked a great deal by repairing at his best speed, in order to keep watch, for his confidence in himself had no limit, and now, of all others, was the time to enforce the secret so important both to Lucy and himself. We leave him to his peril, and turn to events in another quarter.

CHAPTER IV.

IN the depth of the forest were large tracts of a far different character from that which we have seen hitherto. In many places were large stony ravines, intersecting each other in chaotic confusion, forming beds for dwindled streams, and stagnant deposits of black and slimy water, that marked the commencement of extensive bogs of blue clay, covered with a treacherous verdure, which often tempted the wandering cattle into difficulties from which no plunge could extricate them. Frequently where the soil appeared to be hard and dry, and the furze and fern were luxuriantly tangled, an incautious foot would set roods waving like the swell of a sea, the safety of the intruder depending entirely upon the toughness of the surface. Very few strollers, therefore, penetrated to these regions. Even the sportsman who knew the dangerous geography, and went almost everywhere, would seldom risk himself and his dogs where, if they were not swallowed up, they were sure to be very soon dead beaten. Besides, there was little to tempt his game

to such places, or any living creature except a large community of owls and carrion crows, which built unmolested in the huge decayed trees, grouped in every position where a firm patch of earth afforded them foot-hold. The only persons who, from time to time, visited this strong fortress of ague and rheumatism, were stray poachers and charcoal-burners, who occasionally picked up a deer that had been driven from his herd, or felled some towering beech beyond cognizance of the law. To such persons only were the safe lines of access familiar, and, at intervals of several miles, might be found some roughly constructed shelter of boughs and brambles, furnished and thatched with whatever undergrowth chanced to be at hand.

In one of these samples of forest architecture, Bunckle—who had often carried on his smuggling trade with villages far distant from the element of the ‘Cockle Shell’—had established a depository for his tubs, and, when he broke out of prison with Aaron, thither they betook themselves till they could decide what to do next.

On the night of which we have been giving so lengthened an account, whilst the darkness was as black as the carrion crows, and the whoop of the owls gave additional horror to the howling of the storm, might have been heard the fitful groan of an inmate of this den—a groan not of bodily but mental agony, which would have been apparent from involuntary exclamations too frightful for anything else. They alluded one while to some confederate

who did not come, and again, to visions of hangmen and gibbets, and final destinations. From which the reader will conclude that the writhing desperado was Aaron Daunt.

On escaping from the barn where Cheek was apprehended, Aaron had fled straight for this remote sanctuary, which, by the instinct of a long accustomed dweller in the bush, he had contrived to reach under difficulties which, to others, would have been insurmountable. Like most, we believe, who commit great crimes—and Aaron was under the impression that he had perpetrated two murders—he found a great difference in his sensations before and after these achievements, particularly the last, for which there was so much less motive. The exasperation which had urged him blindly on seemed almost to be driven from his feelings by the shot that had felled the supposed head of Crowley, and he had hardly got off when Conscience, with an ever ready reproach, began to ask him the question of whether he had not wreaked upon one man the wrongs he had received from another. Or in other words, ran a muck so indiscriminate as to confer a show of justice on his first conviction, and make any future fate less pitied than the rattling bones which, at that period, scared the traveller in every haunt of the highwayman. Now that there were none to be revenged on, he felt his former nature return in a shape more frightful than his wrongs, and he had dashed along his lonely midnight path, pursued by phantoms that would have

made it a relief to dash out his brains against the first impediment.

It was more than two hours since he had hurled himself into that hut, and pressed his clenched fists against his temples, as if to crush out all power of reflection, when another figure stole through the dismal gloom, and the blast brought to his ears a low and cautious voice which murmured “Father!” Aaron started up in a sitting posture.

The voice was no delusion, for the speaker came nearer, and now murmured the name of Aaron. It seemed the call of an accusing spirit; but the tones were well remembered, and he took courage to answer it with a wild exclamation of “Nelly!”

Poor Nelly! We are sensible that on her first introduction to these pages we gave no favourable impression of her: but it must be remembered that very many of us would lose much were we estimated in connection with the soiled specimens of humanity amongst which we may chance to be mingled. Where there is no field for the better qualities to show themselves, they must of necessity be hidden, and those whose fate it is to travel over the roughest regions must arm their feet accordingly. Something of her real nature has occasionally glinted forth, like the daisy on the fallow, but not enough to do her justice, and we have scarcely space left to make her amends. We are, in fact, in the position of some improvident old gentleman, who has emptied his pockets amongst his most importunate applicants, and reserving little or nothing for the most

deserving. But Nelly was easily contented in her days of hardship, and would be as easily satisfied with her niggard history.

Perhaps one of the most joyous moments it afforded was when she sprang to the side of Aaron. He was, like herself, not always the character in which circumstances have obliged us to describe him. Others had made him a ruffian, but nature, like a bird of passage, never omits her passing visit to the nest from which she has been expelled ; and Nelly had heard kind words and received kind sympathies and much that gained value by force of contrast, under the roof of Mr. Cheek.

“ How came you here, Nelly ? ” said Aaron, as soon as he could speak ; “ I heard you were at Sea Cliff.”

“ I travelled from Sea Cliff to-day, Aaron. I did not walk. The generous hand of Mr. Crowley helped me to hire a conveyance.”

Aaron uttered a deep groan.

“ Why do you groan, Aaron, when you must be so happy ? ”

Again he groaned, and more deeply than before.

“ Aaron, what ails you ? Surely your freedom is not less welcome because it comes from him ? I have much more to tell you of his goodness ; for the moment he heard from me that you had been sent to prison unjustly he gave me this letter for you, and said you might expect amends much better. I have been ill from overwork, or I should have

taken it to Lympton, if my father had not written to say you were here."

"What is it about, Nelly? What does he say to me?"

"I don't know what he says, but I know he enclosed a bank-note in it."

Aaron shuddered, and dropped upon his face.

"Go on, go on; I cannot be more damned than I am already."

"Oh, do not use such words. I know Cheek hated him, and tried to make you hate him too; but you are too good for that. I do not wonder you are sorry; but Mr. Crowley will never wish for more."

"Never, never, never!"

"Then only think how good to send you this by me; because, he said, it would have more value from my hands. You cannot see how I am dressed, that such a visitor might not disgrace you in the prison. It was his order, his money, Aaron. It makes me cry, but I am very, very happy. We shall never have such another friend."

"Never more, Nelly, never more. Did you come through Broome Warren?"

"No; I did not wish to be seen there. I knew another road, though many miles about. But I only began walking where the forest was too rough for wheels. I know it so well I could find my way blindfold; for in this spot I have many and many a time watched for my father. He cannot be far off since I find you here."

"And where shall I be next?"

"I do believe, from something he said, that you will be with Mr. Crowley."

"Never, never; for he will be in heaven, and I in hell. Away, Nelly, away! I told you I am damned, and you will not believe me. Hear, then, to your cost; or rather, fly away from me before my words strike you dead!"

"Aaron, you frighten me! You are not mad?"

"Oh that God had made me so, and not left the work to my own hands! I tell you Crowley is in heaven. I sent him there myself. This cursed night I murdered him!"

Nelly shrieked and fell, as if he had murdered her too, when another voice broke in—

"No! It's a lie! You did no such thing! whatever you have done by my poor girl! Nelly, Nelly! a curse upon your bellowing, she cannot hear me! Stop your ramping and roaring, and bring me a hatful of water! I say you have murdered nothing and nobody but a hay-stack; for I just left Mr. Crowley as much alive as you are."

Nelly just heard the last words, and, with Aaron, sprang speechless from the ground, while Bunckle pursued his rough and breathless explanation. How he had listened at the barn; how he had warned Crowley, and how his hat had been shot through much nearer his own head than that of the intended victim. He went on to say that, on parting from Crowley, the abode of Cheek had lain in his way to the forest, and that he had witnessed his arrest and

determined to see the end of it; the danger incurred, considering the multitude of strangers by whom he was surrounded, not being enough to deter him. He had not only followed the indignant march across the green, but had actually suffered himself to be thrust by the pressure behind him amongst the magistrates where he had heard all that passed. "And now, Aaron, what do you think he did? He not only accused you of shooting Mr. Crowley, but of stealing his gun for the purpose, which I know you did not, because I saw him give it to you! He did, as I hope to be saved! And what do you think they've done with him? They've sent him to Lympton to be tried at the assizes, and burnt his house down! Barns, stacks, and every stick about it! I left 'em in a roaring flame, and nothing to be sorry for except a box of his papers which, they say, would have been the best proof of the evidence against him. But nobody dared venture into the fire for it."

Aaron uttered a fierce exulting cry—"Accused me of the murder for which he offered to pay me, did he? Of stealing the gun which he placed in my hands? By the hottest of fires it shall be a hot fire that saves him! God bless you both. There's work worth doing! Take care of yourselves, and you shall hear news enough!"

With which he sprang like a tiger from his lair, and crashed away with the wind.

CHAPTER V.

LONG and stormy was the watch of Crowley on that night, but his well-imagined, though over-rash project brought little hope of success; for, in the first place, the stack he left in flames was burnt out, and the situation in which it had stood was undistinguishable, so that he could not tell whether he had returned to the exact spot of his adventure; and, in the next place, it was very unlikely that Aaron would come to seek his gun whilst there was not light to look for it. His only chance, was in the first gleam of morning and a close attention meanwhile to every variation of the wind, with its many hints of approaching action, and as many disappointments. In ordinary circumstances he would have been almost worn out, for he had gone through much exertion; but, in the present, he seemed to grow more alive at every moment, and gradually the lulling of the blast made him more so, for it enabled him to listen with more assurance. Still, when there was no whisper from the sky, there was a dead silence everywhere else. He was

wet, and would have been very cold and comfortless if he could have thought of such trifles, but he never moved from his dripping bush whilst the rustle of a twig might attract notice from the lurker whom he imagined to be close at hand. There was nothing to be done but to keep his eyes fixed for the first break in the east. It broke at last, and showed him he was not far from the spot he had sought, but it showed him nothing more. In another hour, the day came on calmly ; and, as the light increased, his expectations faded. If Aaron had intended coming he would hardly have delayed till after people were abroad to observe him, and he was obliged to conclude his long watch a failure.

It was not, perhaps, so great a failure as he thought it, for it had kept him away from Cheek's conflagration, where he might certainly have seen Aaron, but in all likelihood have lost his life in attempting to secure him ; for prudence, we have seen, was not his greatest gift. But we must here tell things as they were told to him, and keep him company till he returned reluctantly to the confused scene he had left.

It was a gloomy sight. All the busy idlers seemed to have been blown in a heap to Cheek's corner, where the smoke was still hanging in a long and heavy canopy, and continued thickening with black and white jets from charred posts or dangling bits of rafter, still alive with smouldering fire. The range had been extensive, counting barns and various out-houses, in addition to the dwelling

house ; and whatever was left appeared clad in deep mourning for its master. The police were active in all parts, and over the debris of the barn that had contained the tin box, in particular, and to these he hastened first. The sergeant was just emerging from the ashes, and seemed to feel Crowley a welcome sight.

“ I am glad you were not here before, sir. I guess where you have been, and should have been there too, for it was well thought of ; but I knew there was no chance of Aaron whilst it was dark, and it was of no use to go afterwards. We knew too well what had become of him.”

“ What do you mean ? What has become of him ?”

“ Just what would have become of you, sir, I suspect, if you had chanced to be here ; for the errand that took you away shows you don’t think too much of your safety. The man is buried somewhere in those ashes, and we are trying to dig him out.”

“ Burnt !”

“ Aye, sir, that he is. We used every exertion for more than an hour to get at that box I told you of ; but were always driven back by the fire, which the wind blew in all directions, till we had nothing to do but look on till it moderated. At this time, while we were thankful to find ourselves alive, we saw the most horrid sight I ever looked upon ! In the midst of the flames rose up that man Daunt, dashing about the fire in his last agonies. We tried at all hazards to get to him, but it was impossible,

and after a few moments we lost sight of him. How he got there I can't conceive. He would hardly have ventured on purpose ; and, if he had hidden himself on the premises at the time we took Cheek, he would have been stifled long before. There were plenty of people all round the ruins, except where the wind drove the smoke too thick to live in, but nobody saw him come out, and there he must lie, somewhere, consumed to a cinder."

Crowley was very much shocked, both at Aaron's terrible fate and his own final loss of the source upon which he had so mainly counted ; but he felt that his absence might indeed have been fortunate for him. What he might have dared for a last hope he was afraid to think of ; but he was still unreasonable enough to retain some glimmer of it, though nobody else did. Aaron's miraculous escape from Lympton still kept it alive, and it was too precious to be given up. He therefore assisted some hours in the search, and was much cheered at the end of them that nothing was discovered. At the worst, there might be some reliance on the Vicar's letters, and when the day was sufficiently advanced he resolved upon the visit he had undertaken to Mrs. Bloomer.

He could hear from where he stood that she was at home, for she kept everybody aware of that fact by her constant screams of "dilly, dilly, dilly," and so he took the liberty of considering himself included in the invitation. He was, however, rather premature, for it was not yet her hour to receive

visitors, and she had not assumed her overalls or her last fashionable head-dress, and was nothing but *papillotes* and deshabille, with a bowl of potato pealings in her hands, and before her a voracious squattering from the duck-pond. On seeing the intruder taking stock of her attractions, she looked very much disposed to hurl the bowl at his head, but confined herself to a rebuke more stately.

“I think, sir,” she said, “I have seen you before—Mr. Crowley, I believe ? I do not usually receive visitors at this early hour ; but, no doubt, you come on business ?”

Crowley felt strongly inclined to forget his polite gravity. He had called, he said, thus early to relieve his mind from a painful apprehension that Mrs. Bloomer’s anxiety for the Vicar might be injurious to her health.

“Oh, goodness me !” she replied, “how very considerate ! Perhaps you can also do me the favour to say what you have done with him. Whether he is still living, and, if not, whereabouts he is buried ; and likewise what has become of his niece, whom I hear you arrested in her flight with Captain Cox. It has caused a great deal of talk in the neighbourhood, but I hope it will be hushed up and end in a marriage.”

“I am sorry to tell you, Mrs. Bloomer, that she is not married yet, though I trust you may have the happiness of seeing her provided for before very long.”

"Oh, dear, I hope so; though I pity the poor man. But, perhaps, he may not be very wise; and then if he can prevent her from running away again he may not be much worse off than before."

"Very possibly not. It is pleasant to hear you say so. Mr. Bloomer, I am rejoiced to say, is still living, and likely to live for many years."

"Indeed! I hope he will not think of coming back to his living as long as it does him good to forget it." And so with mutual regard they bowed and curtsied their way into the house.

Whether it was now for the first time, or whether it was malice preposse, we cannot tell, but Crowley certainly felt that morning that he might confer a great blessing upon all parties concerned by committing just a small sin against one of the injunctions of the marriage ceremony. He was, in fact, revolving in his mind the very great pity that, when old ladies and gentlemen live together with such a galling strain upon their bonds, the clergyman should forbid all commiserating friends to unloose them. Would there be so very much harm in doing so very much good, and diverting certain views below ground to very agreeable ones above it? Such were the no doubt reprehensible thoughts of Crowley when he seated himself once more vis-à-vis to Mrs. Bloomer, with a due care to have the table between them.

"And so," she began, "the old man is really alive! And pray, Mr. Crowley, have you any idea

how long he expects me to wait for him ? or whether I am to sacrifice the best days of my life in this miserable old house, with the rain pouring in on one side, and the rats on the other, after he has felt the necessity of running away from it himself ? Do you suppose I should have stayed here in a neighbourhood so far beneath me if I had not felt how indispensable I was to his comfort ? And then to leave me no society but his little moping curate, who can talk about nothing but sermons and sins, and visiting the sick and doing one's duty. I shouldn't have thought of it, indeed ! But I've turned him out of the house, and I won't let him in again, and I won't have any more curates, and you may tell Mr. Bloomer so."

" My dear madam, I see clearly your life is very uncomfortable, and if I can offer any suggestion to Mr. Bloomer for making it otherwise, I do hope you will command me."

" Well, that's something to the purpose, and the first thing you may do is to tell him I won't stay here, for there's not a person within ten miles who shows me decent respect ; and, notwithstanding the excellent temper I am blessed with, I have been obliged to quarrel with the whole county ! Gracious me ! It's abominable, when my two young sisters are engaged to two of the *crème de la crème* of Rosherville Gardens, and drinking tea every evening with all London—it's abominable that, I who am three or four years their elder, should be im-

mured amongst a set of hum-drums who never heard of such a place."

"Quite so, my dear madam; I feel what you say most sensibly. And if I might offer a remark without offence, I should say that you have just dropped a piece of information which seems to open a brilliant resource for you till these young ladies are called upon to fulfil their engagements. No event in life could afford such happiness to both parties as a residence together, which would enable them to enjoy the inestimable benefit of your three or four years of greater experience; and yourself—for it is not to be denied that Mr. Bloomer is advanced in life—to form future arrangements, to which I must not allude more particularly, amongst that immense assemblage of fortune and fashion. But I fear the interest I feel is leading me too far."

"Oh, not at all—not at all. Pray go on."

"Well, if it really would be a delight to you to join these young ladies, and you commission me to relieve you from the pain of making a proposal so embarrassing, I beg you will make any use of me you please, and I will lose no time in ascertaining whether Mr. Bloomer really thinks he could get on reasonably well under so great a privation, and guarantee a proper provision out of the proceeds of this living."

"Oh mi, that would be just the thing! I am quite decided, if the provision is large enough; and you may settle it all to-day!"

“With all the pleasure in the world. And now, as I am pressed for time, perhaps you will allow me to make a small request. Mr. Bloomer has, I believe, preserved a considerable quantity of old correspondence ?”

“Correspondence ! There was not a cupboard in the house that was not full of it !”

“That is most fortunate, and will probably give you the satisfaction of proving Cheek worse than you proved him last night. I doubt, indeed, if it will not hang him.”

“Hang him ! Can’t he be hanged without them ?”

“Certainly not; for the crime on which he is committed is only transportable.”

“There now !” cried the lady, bouncing out of her wits. “There now ! what made him stuff his correspondence into every crack and cranny of the house, like the jack-daws !”

“Very inconsiderate, my dear madam; but if you will only be good enough to give me possession of them, you shall soon have ample proof that it is very fortunate he did not destroy them.”

“Oh dear ! Oh mercy me ! This it is to have a silly old husband to whom no woman in her senses could give credit for possessing anything of consequence !”

“You will give him more credit when you see the immense value of these letters.”

“Gracious ; don’t I tell you they are of no value at all ! Not a single one of them !”

"But you will allow me to look at them."

"Don't I say you can't?"

"But if they are in the cupboards—"

"I tell you they ain't! I wanted the cupboards for a brood of young Dorkings, and moved all the rubbish out."

"But, my dear madam, what did you do with it?"

"Burnt it all in a heap! What else could I do with it?"

Crowley's errand was done, and he rose to make his bow.

"Suffer me, madam, to thank you, on the part of Mr. Cheek, for proving yourself the greatest friend he has in the world, and depend upon my forwarding your views upon Rosherville with all expedition."

Not having any farther civilities at disposal, or leisure to wait for the gracious reception of these, he added a strikingly polite good-morning, and was on his way to Goldsworthy.

But he had first to go to Tom Philpot for his horse, and at every step of the walk his exasperation more and more confirmed his belief that the fate of Aaron was not to be decided as had been described. The truth was that he could not and would not afford to lose hope from all quarters, and allow the killing doubts of poor Lucy to remain doubts for ever. He persuaded himself that the police, having failed, were unwilling to admit that

success had been possible, and that the superior daring of Aaron, for whatever motive, had put them to shame. In which determined feeling he arrived at Huntsmore Lodge, and found Tom had just returned, and been horrified by the news of the last night.

“Tom,” he said, “I am in your debt for a desperately long hunt for Cox, and I am now unreasonable enough to call upon you for another after Aaron. He is reported to have been burnt in Cheek’s bonfire, but I am certain that he merely showed himself there to prevent further search for him; that he got off scathless, and that he cannot yet be far away. Make enquiries for me, my dear Tom, at all the hiding-places you know,—and nobody knows the country so well. Have hand-bills printed, and offer any reward for his apprehension, or for himself, with every encouragement that may tempt him to come forward. I myself must [ride off to Goldsworthy to prove I am not murdered, and give all my time to the two prosecutions.”

Tom saw there was no time for question or self-reproach for his last night’s absence, and was as eager for this chase as he had been for the first. He ordered out the two horses as fast as they could be saddled, and again vowed stoutly that he would never return without his man.

“Go you, Mr. Crowley, where I hope there is, as yet, no uneasiness about you, and depend upon

hearing news if it is anywhere to be found in the land of the living."

And with these brief words they jumped upon their horses and took their different ways.

CHAPTER VI.

ON arriving at Goldsworthy, Crowley was told that the Vicar was out with the young ladies, but that Lady Goldfield was at home; and, seeing that his night's news had not preceded him, he was glad to defer it till he could hear something more definite of the prospects of Lord Goldfield, and speak what comfort he could to the melancholy mother.

He found her alone, musing and disconsolate, but happy, as on all occasions, to see him.

“I have been wishing very much,” she said, “for a little quiet conversation with you about my miserable son. I need not tell you that his ruin is complete, or that the name which my husband raised so high must become a bye-word and a warning to all who envied it. My days of pride are over, and it is time to think of humility.”

“No, my dear Lady Goldfield. No ruin is complete which might have been much greater. If he has squandered a fortune he has saved what is much more valuable. From my own observations,

and from many inquiries I have made by letter in the best quarters, he is free from all imputation but the imprudence too common in early days and high position. He has on his side the deepest sympathy and indignation of all honourable men, and you are thus relieved from far the heavier half of your affliction. We have only to look to that loss which is of daily occurrence, and which few have the fortitude to hold so cheaply as it is held by yourself."

"We will speak of that presently. I have first to tell you that immediately after his dismissal from this house, and whilst he must have been lurking about Sea Cliff, this man, Cox, with the vengeful feeling natural to such spirits, sent my son the list of his liabilities, far exceeding any amount he can command during his hapless life. It was almost *paid* with his life, which I believe was only preserved by the contemplation of my terrible alarm for it; and he is now brought to that gloomy state of resignation which we hear of in condemned criminals, who, feeling that they have nothing to hope, feel also that they have nothing to fear. From this state I have been thinking how to restore him, and here you can assist me."

"I beseech you, how?"

"I must remove him to a distance from his recent associates, and to other scenes where he can pass his time with the least possible regret for the style of life which he must now leave. His own estate is entailed upon some future, and, I trust, more

provident possessor, and will, of course, be immediately dismantled ; and I want you to help me in the disposal of Goldsworthy. Do not speak your astonishment. I have pain enough already, and it would pain me still more to resist the arguments you are prepared to offer against my settled purpose. To what end should I remain here when all its comforts would be gone ? And what enjoyment could I find equal to the reflection that I have rescued my only son from dishonourable debts to any one, however base ? Should I not feel myself unworthy of the pride with which it was once my lot to be regarded ? It is, I say, my fixed resolution to remove this burthen from our name, and carry with me, if little more, the respect and goodwill of a world which has nothing else so valuable to bestow.”

Crowley had contemplated nothing like this, and could scarcely speak for amazement.

“Lady Goldfield,” he said, “you cannot choose but hear me, and it is not even your displeasure that could silence me. You have told me what you are thinking of, and I must tell you what you forget. You know how you are loved by all whose love is worth possessing : how you are blessed and looked up to : how the wide range of your dependents must suffer by the close of their last hope from the hand that never failed them. You know how your son is loved and honoured for your sake and his father’s, and also for his own ; and now calculate what sort of blessings will fall upon his

head for including in his reckless ruin a mother whom the best man in creation would not be good enough to deserve. I know this sacrifice has never been proposed to him. Beware how you try him, for it would be the last blow to bear him down."

Lady Goldfield trembled as she replied—

"I believe—it is miserable to say I hope—that you over estimate the quality of his principles. He has given me much reason to doubt them. What else is to be done?"

"Anything but the worst. We must trust, as he has trusted himself, to chance ; and I cannot believe that we have none. Of one thing we may be sure—these claims are in abeyance whilst the claimant is in jail for felony. What may be the end of them in the event of a conviction, we cannot say ! but a few days will determine. For Henry—I only ask you to hear me speak to him, and see how far you have misjudged him."

"It is a blessing to be opposed by such words. I know not how to answer them, for my courage and my senses have been bitterly tried. We will talk of this again. My poor Henry was anxious to see you."

"Then let us go to him. I cannot convince you too soon."

As they ascended the stairs to the young lord's dressing-room, they heard him interrogating his servant.

"Who brought it ???" he asked. "Who knows I am here ? Where does it come from ?"

"A messenger has just come with it, my lord, from Lympton jail."

"Lympton jail!"

"By heaven, it is from Cox!" exclaimed Crowley, as they entered. "Break it open—let us hear what he says!"

"Crowley! I am very glad to see you. But jail! Is Cox in jail?"

His dangerous illness had hitherto prevented any communication of the recent history of Cox; and Crowley ran it over in the fewest words that could tell it, amidst rage and amazement that may very well be conceived.

"Now for his letter! Let us see to what extent effrontery, falsehood, and villainy can go."

Lord Goldfield tore it open, and read aloud—

"DEAR GOLDFIELD,

"There is the devil to pay! I am in jail, with a d——d turnkey set over me to see what I write; but the brute can't read, and so no matter. That fellow Crowley—who had better take care of himself when I come out—has sent me here on a false charge of trying to run away with a girl I saw at your mother's, and has bribed a batch of rascals to bear witness against me. Use your influence with Lady Goldfield and her big friends to get me out, or make your Justice withdraw his committal, which is better, and never mind the accounts I sent to you. Moses Pinhorn is clamorous for instant payment, and swears he will make a bankrupt of

you next week ; but I have some influence over him and can gain you more time and a large remission of the debt ; though only if you get me out, now directly, by the bearer. I must be discharged in the morning, for I can't wait, and I won't ! So look to it, for you had better ; and believe me, your sincere friend,

“SAMUEL COX.”

Lady Goldfield and Crowley stood almost stupefied with admiration at this model composition for the guidance of friendly correspondence, though neither of them spoke ; for Crowley thought here was an admirable test of the young lord's real character, and a most timely reassurance for the doubting mother. How would the usual run of sporting young gentlemen have acted under an opportunity which, to such perceptions, would have conveyed no more shame and dishonour than their betting book ? We are rather afraid to pronounce a judgment ; but there was no hesitation in young Harry, of Goldfield, who only stopped, as it were, to swallow something that almost choked him. Every drop of his blood seemed to rush up to his pallid face, and his teeth and his hands were clenched with an indication that it was well for Captain Cox to be defended, even by the walls of a prison. But he only begged pardon for a moment whilst he wrote a few words in reply. Materials lay upon the table amongst his many passports to despair, on which he had been making notes of admiration, and his letter was soon finished.

But it was not addressed to Cox, who was only indulged with a sight of it by the complaisance of the governor of the jail.

“Sir,”—it began to that authority—

“I beg to enclose a letter which I have just received from a prisoner in your custody on a charge of felony. You will make what use of it you think proper, and oblige me by preventing any repetition of insults from a person of whom I know nothing but a long series of consummate villainies. I have the honour to be

“Your obedient servant,

“GOLDFIELD.”

The note was handed to Lady Goldfield with a smile that intimated the writer’s full knowledge of the oppression which chiefly weighed upon her, and which beyond doubt is one of the heaviest with which a parent’s heart can be afflicted—a want of pride and confidence. The unexpected incident of that note, now dispatched by the servant who had waited for it, acted like a flash of sun that is brightest in the darkest shade and melts the cloud that produced it.

“Henry!” she exclaimed, “you are worthy of your father, and your losses are nothing!”

“I wish I could believe so!” he replied. “But, though I hope I have ceased to be what I was, I fear I am not yet a philosopher. Still, imprudence does not necessarily lead to degeneracy, and I was

no more in danger of compromising an insult to my mother and an outrage to Miss Longland than of being won by a bribe or daunted by a threat. I have something else to talk of, for which I must admit you have less reason to be prepared. I have been busy with new plans which I feel are making me a new man. Sit down, dear mother, and hear them, and help me to persuade my only true friend here that if he gives me fresh advice I will follow it better."

There really was a change in him, for he was in better spirits, and spoke as if he had, at last, taken the trouble to think.

"I have been casting up these accounts, and have come to the conclusion that, having cut the ground from my feet, it is time to spread my wings. But not to fly away. Only to soar above the chasm. I have been thinking what I am fit for, and have no doubt my friends would suggest a sinecure, or a gold or silver stick about the Court, or a junior Lordship in the Admiralty, or some other fashionable asylum for incapables; but I prefer working like a man to taxing their interest like an imbecile, and would rather be a special constable than owe my living to special favour. Something I mean to do, though I have not meant it long enough to decide what; only—stop, dearest mother, for I know what you are going to say—certainly not to be an idler and a shame at Goldsworthy; and still less—a million times less—to listen for one moment to the sacrifice you have been planning; which I have

quite seen through, though you have not yet directly declared it. I have been wrong long enough, and you must not overwhelm me when I am right."

Crowley looked exulting in the fulfilment of his prediction, and concluded that his argument must now prevail; but he deceived himself. Lady Goldfield looked equally so, because her previous determination had such additional reason to be steadfast. They had not time to pursue the conversation, for the servant returned to say that a gentleman was come on business to Mr. Crowley,—his name was Badger. The visit was startling, but could not have been more opportune; and Lord Goldfield was presently left alone to solve that often very difficult question of, "What am I fit for?" Lady Goldfield descending to find Lucy, so much the most concerned in the interview, and Crowley to learn what comfort it brought her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE appearance of Mr. Badger was more hearty and hopeful than might have been expected from the cause that brought him, which—as Crowley anticipated—was the woeful fate of Broome Warren. He was impatient to begin upon it, and so was his listener.

“ Since I first heard of this projected sale,” he said, “ my efforts have been unceasing to prevent it; but, though it has taken place in spite of them, I have reason to believe it may be set aside.”

“ That were indeed a blessing; but how?”

“ By another application to Chancery, for which, in certain events, in which I must warn you not to place implicit confidence, I came down to Oakendell, from whence I have been directed on, to arm myself with the sanction of Miss Longland, in whose name I must act.”

“ Miss Longland! But has not all power passed away from her?”

“ I don’t know yet. Hear the grounds I go upon, which have turned up in a very extraordinary

manner. The sale had hardly been concluded an hour, when a person of whom I knew nothing—a Mr. Fozzard—desired urgently to see me, and entered in great excitement. He said he had been the auctioneer on the occasion, and had found himself greatly injured and insulted by Cheek as soon as it was over. He had therefore come at once to me, whom he knew to be interested for the estate."

"I have heard of this Fozzard—a great friend of Cheek's, and supposed to be as great a rogue."

"No doubt of it ; and perhaps so much the better for us ; for there is nobody so honest as a rogue when he quarrels with his partner. He told me he had been intimate with him for a considerable time at Broome Warren, and discovered that he had for years been contriving to lessen the apparent value of it, with a view—as he had several times hinted over his cups—of buying it himself. He could also produce witnesses who had been deterred from bidding by Cheek's discouragement ; which, coming from the agent, had naturally much influence."

"It looks very like truth ; but what can Miss Longland do when Cox has all the claim upon it ? Supposing you succeed, will not the estate go to him, or be put up again ?"

"Perhaps not ; for when I made that observation to Fozzard, he had another singular communication to make. Cheek, being always drunk of an evening, was much in the habit of talking incautiously, and, amongst his inadvertencies, of sparing no abuse of Cox (with whom you remember his suspicious alter-

cation at my office), declaring he would not only defeat him for the estate, but ruin him into the bargain, for buying up the claims with money which did not belong to him. Connecting this assertion with the vague thoughts I expressed to you in London of some great fraud against Miss Longland, I thought we might come at the truth by alarming Moses Pinhorn, whom we believed to be in the secret, though, since I saw you, I had often tried him without obtaining it. Fortified by this new witness, I called upon him again with a new sort of application, charging him directly with collusion and confounding him with a prospect of legal proceedings, which evidently frightened him ; and still more was he frightened when I referred to Cox's impending trial (which I had just learnt from Cheek's own proclamation at the sale), on which, I told him, my first step must be to summon him as a witness, and try the effect of a cross-examination. I had ventured to engage myself as Miss Longland's solicitor for the prosecution, and had brought a subpoena with me, with which I immediately served him, though Cox had already retained him for his defence. So that we shall have him in the anomalous position of witness against his own client."

"Affairs are indeed brightening ; but what will you say to my addition."

Crowley then related his adventures of the last night, with the transfer of Cheek from Broome Warren Chase to Lympton gaol,—the calumny

against Sir Harry Longland, the deed in his favour by the late Downton, as mentioned in Lucy's letters from her father, and enquired how far this circumstance would assist their hopes of prevailing over the Jew.

"Hopes!" cried Badger, whose wrathful energies broke out at every word. "They are more than hopes! Something cannot fail to be made out of all this to establish a confederacy of the whole party. Moses, as the intimate friend and adviser of Downton, must be the very person who drew that deed, and the acts of the other two prove that they have known as much of it as he. We'll call him against Cheek as well as Cox, and to-morrow he shall have another subpoena to be flayed alive by the sharpest counsel on the circuit. Only give me a list of your witnesses, and what they can say, and where I shall find them."

Before this could be done, however, the consultation was interrupted by the hurried entrance of Lady Goldfield, with Lucy and the Vicar, all in the greatest horror at the news they had just heard of the last night. They had, in fact, met the faithful Nelly coming up to the house to report that her father had honestly given himself up to the police, and to describe the extreme remorse and despair in which she had last seen Aaron. Altogether, she was so overcome that Mary Lightfoot had stayed to take care of her.

This put a long stop to business, and we therefore continue from the moment when Lucy, exhausted

by her agitation, was dropping calmer tears to the comforting tones of Lady Goldfield ; and Mr. Bloomer was maintaining that, bring what evidence they might, his letters—his letters would settle everything.

“The letters, Roger Crowley ; you forget the letters you have brought from the Vicarage.”

“No, my dear sir ; I have not forgotten them ; but I grieve to say it is the best thing *you* can do, for Mrs. Bloomer has burnt them every one.”

The old man staggered back a pace, with scarce breath enough to repeat the word “burnt !”

“Alas ! every one of them ! The closets that were full of them have been cleared out to make room for a brood of young Dorkings.”

Mr. Bloomer’s paroxysm of rage was long in finding a word big enough to annihilate his better half.

“But this,” continued Crowley, taking advantage of the golden opportunity, “is not all my news. Mrs. Bloomer, sir, desires me to express her anxiety that you should not injure your health by returning home till you are quite re-established and able to enjoy it, and bids me tell you that she has turned your curate out of the house, and will not have another. I am further commissioned to say that if it is not too great a trial to you, and if you think you can console yourself for the loss of her society, she has no insuperable objection to leaving a neighbourhood where she has quarrelled with everybody, and taking up her residence with her

youthful sisters near Rosherville, where she can cheer the pains of absence by drinking tea with all the nobility of London. But it all depends upon agreement on the amount of separate maintenance."

"Agreement! Bless the dear woman, I'll agree to anything, and go a-begging! I would not stand in her way for the mitre of Canterbury! For the sake of all that's good, let her go and take care of her youthful sisters, the youngest of whom was only fifty-two last birthday. Here, my dear Mr. Wolf—no Fox—Badger, I mean—get a sheet of paper, write what you like, and I'll sign it. Anything to please her—anything!"

If any of his hearers had been in a mirthful mood the Vicar's eager generosity might have raised some indecorous demonstration of it; but all had too much cause for gravity, and persuaded him to take breath and consider.

"Consider! I have considered! I've been considering ever since I was married, and that's long enough. Come to my room, Mr. Fox, and I'll lie down and tell you all I am worth, and you can draw out the separate maintenance before I tumble down in another fit. Give the dear woman plenty! The more she gets the sooner she'll be off. Plenty, plenty! an annuity to Jim Crow into the bargain!"

Mr. Badger looked amused.

"I thought," he said, "that you did not know me. You need not tell me what you are worth, for

I understand your affairs as well and perhaps better than you do yourself."

The Vicar looked bewildered.

" You forget that, years ago in Sir Harry's time, we often met at Broome Warren ; and that, years after that date, you applied to me to draw your marriage settlement."

" You don't say so ?"

" I think I can help your memory ; for though we lawyers cannot always recollect the particulars of our various transactions without reference, I have a particular recollection of your case, because there were peculiar difficulties with the trustee on Mrs. Bloomer's part, another of our fraternity, and a pretty sharp one."

" Who—who was he ?"

" Mrs. Bloomer's father, who would have insisted upon the settlement of every farthing you possessed had it not been for the determined resistance of the friend on your own part ; a very gentlemanly man who came from France for the special purpose."

" France ? Was he a parson ?"

" I believe he was ; and, now I remember, he said he had charge of an English chapel there."

" At Boulogne ! Was it at Boulogne ?"

" That was the place. But why so much astonishment ?"

" His name ? His name ?"

" His name was Seymour."

The Vicar almost leaped from the ground.

" Jubilate !" he cried, " we have it ! we have it !

Seymour is the man ! I must be off to Boulogne ! now ! this minute !”

“ Uncle,” cried Lucy, in fresh terrors. “ Be calm ; you must not agitate yourself !”

“ I’m not agitated, not a bit ! Get me a carriage. I can’t stay ! A fig for the correspondence ! Here’s the man himself !”

“ There is no need for such haste,” interposed Mr. Badger, “ what is the vast importance of Mr. Seymour ?”

“ Tell him, Lucy, tell him, Roger Crowley. Wasn’t he at Boulogne ? and wasn’t Harry Longland there too ?”

“ Yes, uncle ; but you do not know that they were there at the same time ?”

“ I must go and find out. I must find out.”

“ But you know they could not have been,” reasoned Crowley, “ or you would have learnt everything you desire from Mr. Seymour when he came to you in London.”

“ No, I say ; no ! How should I ? He was only a college friend, and knew no more of my family than I did of his. He was only here for a day or two, and was all the time persuading me not to marry. Oh, he was a wise man ; a clever fellow ! If I had only taken his advice !”

“ Uncle, if you go, I will go too.”

“ And so, sir, will I.”

But he would not hear a word of it. Perhaps it was the provocation of his lost letters ; perhaps it was the verification of the Goody Two-Shoes dogma

that when old gentlemen become fractious, they are getting well; but he certainly had more of his senses about him than anybody gave him credit for.

“Ain’t you both witnesses at the assizes?” he cried, impatiently; “and how can you get away? I have no evidence to give, and must go and look for it. Don’t talk. I won’t hear.”

“Only a word, my dear sir. If Mr. Seymour was such a wise man, how can you hope he would stay at Boulogne all his life?”

“Clever fellows often do foolish things. I did one myself,—heaven help me out of it! If I had nothing else to take me away, I must go to town to sign this provision for Mrs. Bloomer and Jim Crow; and my friend Tiger and I can call upon all the Seymours in the Court Guide.”

“Do not press him,” whispered Lady Goldfield. “He is too much excited, and we may do mischief.”

Then turning to the Vicar, who was already buttoning up his coat, she applauded him for maintaining his resolution.

“But you know, Mr. Bloomer, it is too late to go to-day, and Mr. Badger has business that will at least keep him till to-morrow, which will give you time to make proper arrangements.”

“Yes,—true; there’s sense in that. Your ladyship is the only person who never did a foolish thing, or said it either. I leave it all to you. I can’t bear opposition. I must go and lie down.”

With which he tottered out of the room, sup-

ported by Lucy and Crowley, though he was only tottering from his towering rage.

Lady Goldfield took advantage of their absence.

"Mr. Badger," she said, "you were some time ago apprised by Mr. Crowley of the great misfortune in my family, and I wish you much, before you leave us, to look over the demands which have been made on my son. I fear there are no means of averting our complete ruin, though he tells me the utmost he has received for his notes of hand is forty thousand pounds."

"Alas, Lady Goldfield—to my deep sorrow I say it—the question is not what we have received, but what we have acknowledged. Here is the old practice which ruins half the finest fortunes in the land. Your money-lender is a keen lawyer in his own calling, and can safely swear that he never asks more than legal interest; but the conditions of the so-called accommodation oblige the unthinking borrower to admit amounts far different, corresponding with his necessities and his trust in the chances of the gaming-table or the race course. He is thus placed beyond the reach of help. There is his receipt in his own writing; and to make his ruin greater, his appeal for justice very often causes the world to bestow its sympathies on the wrong side."

"My poor boy! He knew not what he was doing. He has been led on by his confidence in friendship and honour where he now finds nothing that is human. Is there no hope to be placed in

the exposure of this person on his trial for other crimes?"

"I cannot tell. Stranger things have happened, but I must not encourage hopes that may prove deceptive. The trial will soon take place, and till then we must keep up our courage."

"Heaven has enabled me to do so by placing in my hands the means of rescue."

"To some extent Lord Goldfield is protected by the law. As a peer of the realm his liberty is safe, and his estate is no doubt entailed."

"I know it; but such immunities formed no part of my husband's pride. He would have been the last to avail himself of any privilege not shared by all alike; and I have no ambition in life but to be guided by his memory, and feel the higher we are placed the more we are bound to be just."

"But your ladyship forgets that these claims are not just."

"You say we cannot prove them otherwise; and what the law calls just is just in the eyes of the world. To be poor and respected is to be rich and happy, and with that I am content; therefore I ask you to help me."

"Be pleased only to tell me in what way."

"It is, I think, an easy one. I want first to know the exact extent of my son's obligations, and then some experienced person from London to make a fair estimate of the value of this place. I hope it may prove high enough to set him free. I apply to you," and she spoke almost with gaiety to quiet

a slight quiver in the old man's countenance, "because men of business have no right to sympathies, which only lead to partial advice. I began this subject with Mr. Crowley, but found we had been friends a great deal too long. With you it is all future, and there is nothing to prevent a good beginning. Will you begin by making this commission a profound secret, and doing it without delay?"

"Lady Goldfield, you are used to be obeyed more cheerfully. Persons of my profession see much of character. But I find we have something yet to learn."

"You must not waste your praise upon a client who defies counsel. If you knew how light I make of this business you would do it more readily than the poor Vicar's marriage settlement. There is but one thing that would vex me in its execution, and that would be any knowledge of it amongst my friends and neighbours before it is completed. I would go away, as it should seem, to pass the winter in some warmer climate—Italy, or anywhere else, I have no preference; for pity and condolence of such a nature would be hard to bear, and might create some unforeseen regret for a change which, at present, I view with nothing but pleasure. The child will laugh or cry at its nursery tale in accordance with the tone in which it is told, and I would not run the risk of being carried back to the foot of the hill when I am travelling half-way down on the opposite side. Therefore

you must be very secret, and very quick. You do not refuse?"

"No, madam; there is not a savage in creation who could refuse you anything. Give me a moment—let me think. I wish this could be witnessed by a thoughtless generation who are daily purchasing the applause of the profligate at a like expense."

"Have done, I pray."

"Have patience with me. Since I cannot control your course, I must do my best to smooth it. Your proposal of a land surveyor will not answer your purpose. You would confide it to a third person on whom you might less depend for silence."

"Then how would you amend it?"

Mr. Badger made a long pause to consider, during which he might have been thought to have more plans than he spoke of.

"Lady Goldfield," he proceeded, "you have only to look at the advertisements in any newspaper to see the rapid vicissitudes of our grandest properties—heirlooms from our grandest families, transferred to new possessors—degraded, subdivided, and no more heard of; and this too often for causes which strain my fortitude, though borne so serenely by your own—a headlong madness, driven by a few demons whose profession is to grease the wheels of ruin. With some of these my practice has too often brought me in contact. They know when the tide is at ebb or flow, correctly as a cormorant. *Whose purse is empty, and*

whose is full; *who* has the birthright to sell, and *who* has the mess of pottage to purchase; *who* is in despair, and *who* is flushed with a short-lived ambition. Many of the greatest transfers are made at their offices, and they are the likeliest persons I know to accomplish this one with the expedition you desire. But I cannot deal with them till you oblige me with your title-deeds."

"They are at my bankers'."

"Then please to give me an order for them."

Lady Goldfield wrote and delivered it as if it had been a happy receipt for all that it cast away; and presently Crowley returned with the not unwelcome news that he had prevailed on Lucy to offer no farther opposition to the wild project of her uncle; provided Mr. Badger could promise her that he should be carefully watched over. The condition was of course heartily conceded.

"Let Miss Longland place full confidence in the care of her father's old friend. Mr. Bloomer shall be well looked after, both by me and my family, with whom he will be safely lodged, and he will be well out of the way of the anxieties you will have here till after the assizes, for which you will all need all your thoughts and all your time for preparation."

The rest of the day was passed in a careful examination of Lucy's packet and Lord Goldfield's notes of hand, with many other necessary arrangements; and on the next morning the lawyer took his leave, with the resolute old Vicar, brim full of

importance, and drowning all sounds of lamentation by his confidence that now he was once more a bachelor, and the right man in the right place, everything must needs go right.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHILST the greater events of our history are in abeyance we must attend to some of the smaller ones, which are not without their consequence, though, at first sight, they may seem rather episodical.

It was not many hours since Goose Green had been as little known to fame as fame to its geese ; but, the day after the battle, we beheld that Deity, pen in hand, writing a cheque for it on the Bank of Immortality, the provincial correspondent of which was the County Chronicle. The cheque was duly honoured, and pilgrims, not barefooted nor clad in sackcloth, repaired to the scene in streams of fine carriages and fine feathers from every quarter of the globe, which happened to be within twenty miles.

The public mind, in these parts, had never before been in such a state of fermentation. Memorial hunters collected relics from the site of the haystack and the mansion of Green Lane's End. Artists from illustrated newpapers sketched every scrap of

the neighbourhood ; and Broome Warren Chase, and the Rosary, and the ruins were all of them as exactly like as Wales to Macedon. Portraits were equally happy, and those of James Crowley, Esquire, and the lovely Lucy Longland may be seen in young ladies' albums to this day. There also may be seen the picturesque figures of Mrs. Bloomer and Commodore Bunckle making horrible faces through the chink in the barn ; there two demoniacs loading a blunderbus over a sepulchral tin box ; and there the battle of Goose Green with the fiery charge and lamentable fall of Captain Drinkwater.

There was only one omission on the part of our deity, and this, we regret to say, may prove very much to our loss ; for he gave us no list of the visitors. The élite of society are, on all great occasions, accustomed to see their names in print, and we have heard they are sometimes a little indignant when they do not. Everybody knows the power of patronymics in converting sheets of lead into charming little oblongs of silver paper ; and there is no saying how such magical influence might have affected ourselves. Unhappily, our acquaintance was too limited to fill up the blank ; for, indeed, we hardly knew anybody but Mrs. Toogood's ladies of the bed-chamber, reconnoitring with the drummer and fifer in the suite of Miss Betsy, who was dislocating her delicate shoulder to reach the arm of Sergeant Anak.

Miss Betsy was turning up her innocent face so precisely as if she were looking up at a church

clock, that our eyes naturally followed it, when we made another conjecture that she must be trying to make out the meaning of some mystical figures in the sergeant's foraging cap. There was a 6, and there was a 7, and a large F, and a small t, which might have had relation either to his altitude, as six feet seven, or the number of his regiment, as sixty-seventh foot. But as she made no enquiries, our farther conjecture was, that she must be studying something beneath those hieroglyphics; and, truth to say, there was something there which very often engages the attention of young ladies. Years later, we found a strong resemblance to Sergeant Anak in Mr. Chang, the Chinese giant, whom the last edition of Nature's Book of Beauty (particularly the duodecimo one), pronounced to be as handsome a man as ever looked out of the moon. Cupid then, in Miss Betsy's case, might have been making one of those overhead shots which battue sportsmen are so proud of bringing down, and seemed to have made no miss. There was no doubt of it; for the said Cupid had strong reasons for bagging the big sergeant. Miss Betsy was to be examined at the assizes in connection with certain borrowed letters, and she could hardly have forgotten who had borrowed them. It could, likewise, hardly be doubted that she might think it more pleasurable to pursue her next adventures in a new field; and as that of Mercury had proved dangerous, there might be more security under the shield of Mars.

There was plenty of time to make her election,

for Mrs. Toogood had been too much frightened to be in any hurry about breaking up her garrison, and the garrison was in no hurry to leave her exposed in times of danger. They, moreover, approved of the cellar and the fascinations of the servants' hall, where the young ladies danced in admirable time to the notes of the fifer, and listened in ecstasies to the choice military chorus of "Blankets and pins." It may be thought that such festivities were somewhat in opposition to Mrs. Toogood's household discipline; but they were quite the reverse, for she was convinced of their correctness by the cogent reason that nobody else was, and very proud of doing her duty by our brave defenders.

And thus went on the better part of a week, during the first days of which Mrs. Toogood had completed the outfit of her parish favourites, and supervised the numerous emigration, with Mrs. Crimp at its head, as matron. Never were prospects so happy, both at home and abroad, for when Justice Bulfinch and the Board saw the waggon loads depart they felt the next event could be nothing less than the end of a wicked world; and Mrs. Crimp and her interesting charge all went off screaming, in the intoxication of transport, how her blessed Honour should hear of them in heaven as soon as they got there.

The week's end was more marked than the beginning. It wanted but one more, and a day or two, to the assizes, and pretty Betsy began to look fidgety. The millennium being quite assured, Ser-

geant Anak received orders to join his regiment, for immediate embarkation to Canada, and Betsy had been too charmed with tales of war to see much attraction in a thousand years of peace. Mrs. Too-good had indeed promised her a monopoly of all the good counsels she had hitherto lavished upon the happy souls who had gone off for the admiration of distant lands ; but Betsy was not covetous, and felt that she would rather leave such benefits to those who were more in want. The sweet strains of the fife and a dear friend to look up to, as she pensively confided to Sergeant Anak during the last festival, were all the happiness she desired. And then, when Mr. Corks had eloquently proposed the last toast to His Majesty's forces and their next meeting, and all the company became sentimental, she rose with a nervous twitch in one eye-lid, observed by no one but the sergeant, to pack up his knapsack, and put her mistress to bed. Strange little innocent ! What could make her so absent ? What could she be thinking of when she mixed so many articles of her own wardrobe in that packing ? And what could she mean by laughing herself into fits !

The next morning, when Mrs. Toogood rang to be dressed, Miss Betsy did not hear the bell. She rang again and again, and still there was no appearance ; till, at last, the infirm old cook hobble up stairs, and knocked at the door.

“ Why, what has become of Betsy ? ” asked her excellent mistress.

" Dear heart alive, ma'am, I'm afeared to tell you !
She's gone away !"

" Gone away !" repeated Mrs. Toogood. " What do you mean ?"

" Yes, ma'am ; clean gone away, before daylight ! Lawk a mercy ! who'd ha' thought it ! She that always seemed so pretty behaved and so modest, as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth ! And all your own bringing up too, ma'am. She's gone away with them sodgers ! And so's the house-maid, and so's my kitchen-maid ! and so, I durst to say, would ha' gone the dairy-maid and the laundress, if one hadn't squinted with both eyes, and the other been all of a twist with turning the mangle ! I'm sure, ma'am, I hope you'll never have no more sodgers, or heaven knows what will become of you and me ! Poor Mr. Corks and John the footman are a knocking the powder out of their heads, and counting the silver spoons, but nothing is took ; nothing but a round of beef and a turkey, and a tongue, and a cold saddle of mutton ; and the rest of the larder which they eat for breakfast."

Poor Mrs. Toogood. " Did nobody see them ? did nobody hear what they said for themselves ?"

" Oh dear no, ma'am ; it was all done long afore we was up, and nobody 'll never hear no more of 'em, for they're gone to the Indies. Here's a letter, ma'am, as is just come by the post, and I'm sure I hope it brings you better news, for they've writ immediate upon it."

Everything was alarming,—worse than the

battle of Goose Green. And what was the letter? A despatch from the Emigration Society, with tidings worse and worse. All the select consignments, with their admirable characters, had no sooner embarked at the Tower Stairs, than they took to the sailors just as kindly as the other young ladies had taken to the soldiers, and made themselves so popular that the captain had been obliged to clear decks at the Isle of Dogs. Mrs. Crimp, the matron, had been the worst of all, and carried off her charges to corrupt the comparatively good people of Billingsgate and Wapping. The Society, therefore, desired to give notice of a separate action in each case for recovery of the usual penalties, against Mrs. Toogood, for false characters and gross imposition.

Fifty-three lawsuits all at once! Mrs. Toogood's head, wise as it was, turned round and round like the spindle of the Fates, though, unlike them, it had spun a destiny for herself. Yes, she was destined to spin out of her mind.

"Lauk, ma'am! Lauk a dear! We thought it was something of that kind, for Mr. Bulfinch has just been here, and I never see a gentleman so angry in all my life, for that 'ere Crimp gal has just sent him her two babbies in a hamper to take care of for her sake."

Mr. Bulfinch and the deputation to triumph over her! Her reputation for wisdom was gone for ever! Good advice, throughout the sphere of her dispensation, at a discount below zero!

"If you please, Mrs. Cook," said Mr. Corks from

the top of the stairs, "be so good as tell missis here's another babby come for Mr. Soap from her emigraters, and he wants to know what he's to do with it."

"If you please, Mr. Corks," called the wheezy footman from the foot of the stairs, "be so good as tell Mrs. Cook to tell missis here's Mrs. Bloomer below as says she has diskivered it was her sweep and ratcatcher as stole the game cock, and she's agoing to have her afore the justices for sending of 'em out of the way."

"Turn her out of the house!" shrieked Mrs. Too-good, who could endure no more. "Send her about her business! Shut up the doors, and call in Dr. Choke! Woe, woe to the two or three who would set the world to rights, for what can they do against a generation that is born to go wrong! If anybody comes for advice, tell them I will never give another word to any human being!"

It was a rash resolution, and very soon to be broken; for Miss Betsy was under the necessity of retiring from the army on her first march. Crowley had been to the village as often as he had a spare hour to hear what tidings had been obtained of Aaron or the vanished box, and on some of these occasions he had made observations on the young lady which caused him to doubt whether he might strictly rely upon the pleasure of seeing her at Lympton. He had therefore made a little arrangement with the sergeant of a force less attractive than that of Sergeant Anak to keep his eye upon

her, and escort her carefully on the day appointed, which arrangement included a small document in the king's name, to be used or not as might be necessary. Now this sergeant belonged to the mounted police, and no sooner did he hear, on taking his round by the Rosary, that Miss Betsy had followed the drum, than he trotted off to his station and slung his saddle-bags behind him, so as to make a very comfortable pillion, and then off he trotted again for some miles, when he came up with the happy party, and sorely discomposed them by the production of his credentials. Betsy screamed for protection to Sergeant Anak; but Sergeant Anak was a good soldier, and a faithful liege of King William the Fourth, and though he had marched far enough to digest his breakfast and could have eaten the other sergeant for his luncheon, he could not swallow that little bit of paper. He looked on His Majesty's envoy as the son of Peleus might have looked on those from the king of men, and then he looked upon Briseis.

"Damme, my girl," he said tenderly, "this is a bad job. We must obey the king, or I shall have a court martial."

Betsy wept on his bosom, or rather in his waist-coat pocket, which she could just reach, and screamed worse and worse—for every word was high treason—that she did not care a button for the king, and Serjeant Snuggs might tell him so.

But the parley between the leaders of the two

forces was more loyal. The red-coat was satisfied that reason sided with the blue, and, knocking out the ashes from his pipe, unstrapped his knapsack to transfer a dainty little bundle to the saddle bags. Then, comforting his pretty rebel with a malediction on his eyes if he should ever forget her, or be away from her one day beyond seven years, he seated her kicking on the palm of his hand to perch her, like a little bird, on the croup of the enemy's charger, and cautioned her mournfully to hold tight by the gentleman's girth.

"Good bye, Miss Betsy," cried the other two ladies, well satisfied that the charger was not chartered to carry four. "'Fraid you'll catch it; but never mind, for you know it's only for seven years."

Sergeant Anak's sensibilities could stand no more. He thundered out "left shoulders forward. Strike up the 'Girl I Left Behind me !' March !"

Loud and shrill were the drum and fife; the steed snorted and plunged off at full gallop, and Betsy fluttered and caroled like a skylark till she vanished in the distance.

Poor little captive ! But matters were not so bad as they seemed. The Sergeant of Police was a good-natured fellow, and, moreover, a good-looking one, with a happy knack at comforting damsels in distress; peculiar, as we have heard, to his painful profession. As soon as he could rein up, he turned a pleasant wink over his shoulder.

"Whisht, my dear," he said, kindly, "don't you take on so. It was no fault of yours, you understand, if those chaps carried you off by force, no more nor it would have been of Miss Longland's, when the sailors tried it on upon her as the sodgers have upon you. How was you to suspect, when the tother gals asked you to take a walk this fine morning, that they was in league with 'em, and what could you do against half a dozen that came up of a sudden with that giant at their head? I heard you screaming, and that I can swear to, long afore I overtook you; and it was nothing but the sight of my cutlash that made 'em give you up. Stick to that, and then Mrs. Toogood can only advise you never to go out o' sight of the Police."

What a capital hint! Betsy wiped her eyes and almost smiled.

"That's the very truth of it, Mr. Snuggs; just as if you had seen every bit of it."

"To be sure it is, my dear, and in course I'll tell missis so; unless you've had enough of her and would rather come with me and pretend to be locked up at the station. We're very sociable there, and I'm sure I'd do my best to make you comfortable. But then again, it don't look so well to be locked up; and, as I've orders to look pretty sharp after you, I could come to the Rosary at breakfast, dinner, and supper time, just to see if you was there you know."

"And so you could, I declare!" and Betsy smiled a little more, and looked all the prettier. "I don't

care which I do ; but pray, if you please, don't make me ride through the village?"

"No, no ; in course not. You jump down and run home, and tell everybody you meet what a narrow escape you've had. And don't think no more about sodgers, for they're only birds of passage, and the police is stationary."

"Oh, I hate the very sight of a red coat ! Don't, please, remind me of the dreadful danger you saved me from ! I shall never feel myself safe when you are not by. We dine at two o'clock precise. But how about my bundle ?"

"Why, you was a-taking it to the wash, in course, and was so frightened that you've brought it back."

"In course ! So I was ! I forgot that," and down she jumped, with a merry laugh at her great want of memory.

"Hey !" called the Sergeant, as she flitted away with her baggage, "what time is breakfast and supper ?"

"Half-past eight in the morning and nine at night. Mind you are punctual."

The Sergeant winked, and Betsy got home, almost dead with agitation at the dreadful fate from which she had been so providentially rescued.

We must not do her new admirer the injustice to suppose that his capture of Miss Betsy was achieved solely with a view to her pleasant society and its perquisites, though these may have added some

alacrity to his long trot. He was gifted with a fair share of intelligence, and quite understood that her evidence was most material against Cox on the charge of purloining Lucy's letters. Indeed, now that Aaron was gone, she was the only one to be relied on; for, though there was no want of witnesses respecting their recovery, there was no one else to prove that Aaron had been employed by his master. He had shown some interest connected with the history of Lucy, irrespective of Cox, and it might have suited him to get possession of them to that end. The Sergeant was also the more proud of his prize from having heard, during his attendance on another petty session, that the Bench felt much uncertainty about a conviction on the abduction case. It might have been that every old gentleman thought he could have managed it better himself, but they all agreed in doubting the evidence and the effect of a commitment by a very young magistrate who was known to be not much less concerned in a conviction than the young lady herself. What a pity he had acted so hastily, and not remanded the prisoner before heads more experienced! And the experienced heads shook themselves wisely, and shook out all allowance for the emergency. We may add that they also shook out a great deal of confidence from Crowley's, for most people would have grown nervous in proportion to the nearer approach of events involving so much. He had been calculating his strength

to meet the demand for it more uneasily every day.

Lucy could testify to nothing but an attempt to enter the house, as none had actually been made to carry her off. Their brave landlady had not seen Cox till he was committed, and what she knew of his intentions was only gathered from Bunckle in a state of drunkenness. In Bunckle himself there was small hope, for it would be apparent that he had turned traitor to his employer to escape his own share of the consequences. Then, on the robbery of the letters, he felt with the Sergeant that his chief hope rested upon Miss Betsy, who might be thought the greater culprit of the two.

There was not less discomfort in regard to Cheek, for though few doubts could be entertained of his guilt, there were a great many of his conviction. The evidence of Mrs. Bloomer would perhaps go for nothing, in consequence of her well-known enmity and random gabble of whatever malice came uppermost. The prepossession against Bunckle would be the same here as in the case against Cox ; and though the gun, which had belonged to Sir Harry, was a strong feature, a jury might hesitate whether it had not been stolen, as alleged ; for Aaron, who had not shrunk from attempting murder, would invite suspicion of anything else. As for the two or three policemen, they were but a raw material in that day, and looked upon with great caution long after from notable examples of a strong propensity to

make the most of whatever fell into their hands ; in addition to which they had nothing to speak of but a conversation in a storm which they confessed to have been deafening. The most important hope of all rested upon Moses Pinhorn ; but this was another case, and, unfortunately, only a case of conjecture.

Such were the desponding expectations in all quarters when a letter came from Mr. Badger, on the day before the assizes, to demolish the small faith that had been placed in the Vicar's great dependence on his friend, the Boulogne clergyman, who was found to have gone away some years ago. This itself would have been no serious addition to the misgivings at Goldsworthy ; but what could be said of the lawyer's conclusion ? Mr. Bloomer, without a word of notice or any assignable cause, and without seeming to have made the slightest provision for such a step, had disappeared and not been heard of for five days ! Persons innumerable had been sent after him ; some to represent the dire effects of such hallucinations at Goldsworthy ; some to arrest him as an escaped lunatic, and, if he was still deaf to common sense, to bring him back in a straight waistcoat ; but nobody could find or hear of him. As a last resource, Mr. Badger was driven most reluctantly to inquire if he had wandered back to the country ; reluctantly, because he knew that if he was not there, the tidings must be a shock that would render Lucy's appearance at the trials almost hopeless. His

fears bade fair to be justified; but nobody could have estimated her courage in defence of her father. Her state was pitiable; but, instead of disabling, it raised her to an effort scarce credible in one so young, so delicate, and so unhappy.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was grievous for Crowley to look upon these accumulating trials without the power of affording the faintest clue out of them or offering a word of reasonable comfort; for the urgent necessity for his presence at home to attend to the details of the doubtful event before him, made it impossible to be again absent. Nothing of course was omitted in the way of advertisement and reward and constant communication with London, but days passed without any result beyond their wasting effects on the looks to which he could bring no cheer. The neighbourhood, assisted by the desponding agencies we have noticed, was ringing with the ruined case of Goldfield, and the fading Lucy was reported to be in a state too precarious to proceed with it. The Vicar was regarded, for the time, with more reproach than he ever deserved for past delinquencies, and his foremost accuser was the partner he had taken for no better but a great deal worse. Mrs. Bloomer would indeed have been one of Crowley's

greatest perplexities had he not been too busy to heed her. After waiting a few impatient days for the fulfilment of his undertaking to rejoice her with a separate maintenance she became exasperated to no common display of betrayed confidence. She had trusted her interests to a base pretender to her thanks, made all her arrangements in conformity, apprised all her London friends, especially her delighted young sisters who looked up to her with such love and admiration, and was now to become an object of pity and the slave of expectation to a wicked old man who had monopolised the bloom of her life, and no doubt intended to be never more forthcoming till the day of judgment.

Under this provocation of intolerable wrong she had dispatched a daily representation of her state, in the unimpeachable style that we have already admired, to the great agent of deception—the false Mr. Crowley, all more energetic than the last, because the last was never answered, and finally she convinced herself that she had a legal claim to redress, and beset him with the prancing caco-demons of other days who had succeeded to the practice of her eminent father, the late Mr. Liptrot, Attorney-General and Secretary of State for the Board of Guardians. These gentlemen being rather in want of profitable occupation for occasional leisure hours, employed themselves unremittingly in obeying her commands, and no doubt the reader would derive great improvement from the perusal of their correspondence, but as Crowley sent it all

home again it only lives in our lamentations, from which we turn to the movements of the principal aggressor, Mr. Bloomer.

Mr. Bloomer then, as after investigation informed us, had cherished plans of his own, which he kept, as a man has a right to do with his own, entirely for his own use : and these plans were to run away from Mr. Badger on the first occasion that offered after they left Goldsworthy. It did not occur till some days had been spent in fruitless inquiries for news of Mr. Seymour wherever there was a chance of obtaining it ; nevertheless, the Vicar was in no wise discouraged. No one could look more cheerful, and he received the compliments of Mr. Badger and his family on being greatly improved since his removal from the country; so apparent was this that they did not think it necessary to keep up that strict *surveillance* which they had observed at first, and he took his walks and amused himself with the freedom of other people ; gradually using the household to his absence for hours at a time.

The absence one day was longer than it had been before, and some uneasiness was caused by his not returning to dinner, a family ceremony at which he had hitherto made it a point to be punctual. He was equally remiss at the tea table, and the uneasiness became an alarm which lasted all night. The next day began the search we have mentioned, and the next and the next informed town and country that the Rev. Mr. Bloomer had absconded. The first apprehension was that he had been run over in

the streets, and when it was assured that no one had suffered from that mishap, and that Guy's and Bartholomew's had no clerical importation from the country, it was doubted whether the temptations of Mr. Cheek's black bottle, so long resisted, had again beset him from some palace on the pleasant road to repentance. But no backsliding of this nature appeared against him, and no contradiction to the first surprise that he had been guilty of

“A truant disposition, good, my Lord.”

The Vicar's memory had served to furnish his pocket with a good supply of money, though he forgot everything else that is considered necessary for an outfit; and so he began the pursuit of his own opinion, like the sportsman who follows his fly in the Hymalayas with a very cautious regard for the tiger that sometimes makes one of the company. He directed his course to the eastward, and after dodging round a multitude of corners and crooked alleys, began to peer cunningly into the small shops by the way till he found himself not far from the Thames, and here he speedily lighted upon the particular shop he wanted, which was a retail establishment for ready-made apparel.

“They'll be sure to advertise me,” he thought, “and then they may catch the happy person who wears my clothes.”

With that he made acquaintance with the merchant, who, in these parts, always stands at his door to welcome customers as he did in the day

of the Tudors, and informed him that he was going to take a little sail down the river and should be glad of some more substantial costume and permission to leave his own till called for. Being invited in with that abundant politeness which is usual in the prospect of a good bargain, and the surprise of a first transaction with a gentleman, he was bowed into an inner warehouse, where in great haste and agitation he disrobed himself, and was presently studying his transformation into a small skipper or captain of a collier. It was no bad precaution to make a careful survey, in order to be quite sure of himself whenever the time came to resume that character. The Hebrew gentleman—for we are again amongst the tribes—tenderly folded the discarded suit and locked it up; and what was very remarkable, declined to take payment for that which he had supplied, till the excellent gentleman should come back to resume his own. Mr. Bloomer was amazed at his simplicity and confidence in a stranger, who might never come back at all; but his scruples were over-powered by the pride of the honest man in having so worthy a customer on his books. He then begged to be directed to a place from which the vessels sailed for France, and was courteously guided to the Tower stairs, from whence the ‘*Bien Aimée*’ was just about to drop down with the tide. The honest dealer was anxious that his excellent customer should not miss his passage, and made him step out as fast as he could, till he wished

him good-morning by the side of a boat of some fifty or sixty tons, taking in sundries for Calais. It was just what he wanted, for he had geography enough to remember that Boulogne was not far beyond the landing, and he was rejoiced to think that he should certainly hear something of Mr. Seymour the next day, and prove himself what everybody else had doubted, the right man in the right place.

The ‘*Bien Aimée*’ was rigged as a cutter, and manned by four men and a boy, including the captain. It had a small cabin—a perfect nosegay—and contained half-a-dozen berths, two of which were engaged by mankind of some sort, a third by a pleasant-looking dame from the refined side of the Channel, of an age we may call tender, because it is always the most tenderly touched on, and a fourth was very much at the service of the new applicant, who having no venture but the venture of his person, no language in common but the little French he had learnt at school, some sixty years ago, and no regard directed to anything but the faces on shore, was very soon established as a monsieur, who had no desire for investigation; which was more confirmed by the incongruity of the dress and the wearer, who could not refrain from surveying himself in the water with a doubt as to which of the crowd he might be. The other two berths were waiting for occupants; but, as nobody came, the captain only delayed till there was no tide to help him out of the river, and then he hoisted sail—the rule with

“*nous autres François*,” being always to be in a hurry, but never in time.

The eyes of Mr. Bloomer, now that he was relieved from one sort of apprehension, began to twinkle about him, and very soon hit upon another. The ‘*Bien Aimée*’ had not cleared the crowded shipping before it was evident that she had a will of her own, and no respect for the rudder,—that her ropes were rotten, and her sails tied up with knots,—and that her whole and sole dependence was in the

“Sweet little cherub that sits up aloft.”

She had not proceeded far when the wind, which began to freshen from the Essex meadows, began to offer unpleasant comments, with the reservation of a few more at sea. But the crew and the company made themselves comfortable, and chattered away, for our French friends have exclaimed “*C'est égal*,” too often to doubt its charm over all the perils of life, and never think of being afraid till it is too late.

Nor was the Vicar more afraid than the rest of anything but a mooring on the mud, and the sort of passengers that might chance to follow in the next steamboat. As long as he went glibly he was brimful of exultation and would have been the merriest soul in the conversation if he had understood it. In proportion, however, to the progress of his voyage, and the diminution of his terrors of pursuit, he so far amended in this respect that a

few words—which at first were no tongue in particular—stole over his memory, and afforded an occasional guess at his meaning; ere long they became sufficient to carry him through the continental catechism of whether he was married or single, and how many children he had, and other matters of equal interest, to which all foreigners lend so attentive an ear. But though, with his brisk spirits, which appeared to rise with the wind, he improved in popularity, he certainly lost ground in estimation. It was clear he had hung back at first from fear of being questioned too closely, and that his restless watch on all sides had been occasioned by apprehension. There was some privately expressed curiosity to know what monsieur could have done, but foreigners are generally more liberal than Englishmen in such respects, and have seldom any serious concern for offences which are not notorious.

Thus matters went on sociably enough till the night was coming on, and the tempers of most people would have run restive at the Captain's delay at starting, when they saw themselves only just rounding the first bluff to the sea. Here the party soon became restive enough, for the warning which they slighted in the morning, when there might have been time to expostulate, came again to remind them that their Captain was improvised for the occasion, and only promoted because he, in common with many of his gifted nation, considered himself fit for every emergency. Being active about nothing

and noisy about everything, which often inspires great confidence, he was Captain enough for the poor souls who committed themselves to his seamanship till he found a bold breeze from the North Sea charging him on the back of a roaring white horse, with an awful troop of white horses in the rear. The sail of the ‘Well Beloved’ was struck hard enough to lay her half under the water, and the swagger was carried away by the same puff, and Mons. le Capitaine danced about the deck to enquire of his crew what on earth he should do. The crew clattered over each other with a firm opinion that he would never do anything on earth again, for they were, in fact, not over-well qualified to advise. Having been relieved from the vigilant eyes of their more experienced Commander they had allowed themselves free access to a brandy cask, which stood upon tressels between the steerage and the compass; as if one were as needful as the other, and were half seas over in a double sense; and there was a confused cry of all who had a right to know nothing about the matter of “haul in the boom and down with the mainsail,” but the boom would not come when they hauled, and the steersman ran from his rudder to help an inane old creature, who had sunk to a sitting posture because he could not stand, and was choking with brandy and tobacco juice. Their united efforts were not enough to straighten the rope, and were quite as useless when the two French passengers rolled forward to lend assistance, for the first curvet on salt water waves.

had turned their heads like all the rest, whilst the lady was tumbling to and fro at the risk of being dashed into a new constellation. The Vicar, feeble as he was, never lost his presence of mind, for his mission was too mighty to suffer a thought for himself. He saw that the good ship was galloping with all her might for the coast of Kent, and that in a few minutes she would land all her freight in the hands of his pursuers, so he seized the helm to keep her away and galloped just as fast towards the sands off Margate. But he did better than this, for he collared the boy, a lad of about fifteen, and the best sailor on board, whilst he was running everywhere and shouting “*Nous mourrons !*”

“ Hullo, you boy,” he cried, “ why don’t they let down that peaked sail at the masthead ?” The boy answered that it would not come, because the halliards would not run.

“ Don’t you remember that you tied it up in a knot before we sailed ? Up with your knife and cut it down !”

It was a dangerous service, for the peak was fearfully aslant over the waves ; but the boy was nimble as desperation could make him, and performed his evolution. Down came the mainsail with all the rattling rings of the mast, the heavy spar thundering on the deck, with unaccountable mercy on the limbs beneath ; and the ‘ Well Beloved ’ immediately slackened speed and flapped her boom like a bird with a broken wing. The two landsmen strained their sinews till the wreck was

shipped, and then, having nothing strainable but their stomachs, rolled down to the cabin, whilst Madam, who would rather have rolled overboard, held fast by the Vicar, who, in his turn, held fast by the faith that he had no danger to dread by sea whilst Fate had so much need of him on dry land. His only fear for water was the fear of having too little, and as the Captain still tore his hair and screamed for advice he advised him strongly to heave the lead. The Captain, having never heard of such a thing, had not thought of it, and called upon St. Francis and all the saints of his acquaintance to find it for him. After searching all the lockers on board the saints or somebody else rummaged it out, and then it proved to be a bullet on a ball of pack thread, probably a fishing line, which in such a whirl of wind and tide, was less likely to sink than the good ship herself. The only alternative of the brave old Parson, whose undismayed bearing had established a sudden faith in his pea-jacket, was obeyed without dispute when he insisted on letting go the anchor. Down it went and out ran the cable with a rush that threatened to snap it as soon as it came to an end. It came to an end with a fearful jolt but without the dreaded catastrophe, and the ‘*Bien Aimée*’ stood upright, like a colt in his first lunging.

“God be praised,” exclaimed the new commanding officer. “If it only holds I shouldn’t be surprised if we were saved after all!”

The condition of their safety was very uncertain,

and, if the wind should chance to strengthen, very much against them, of which the helpless captain and his equally helpless crew were just sober enough to be sensible. They looked at the lights on shore, which did not seem more than a mile distant, and they looked seaward at the long black bank of sand, with the battered hull of a wreck upon it scowling an evil omen upon them at scarcely more than a hundred yards, and then they looked over their stern at a diminutive boat which such vessels usually keep in tow for landing or taking up passengers, &c. It would not have carried half-a-dozen persons in the best of weather, and so they could hardly have looked at it with any view to the present occasion ; but the vicar's eye gleamed upon them as brightly as the balls of phosphorus that lightened the now dark night. He was urged to go below and rest till morning, as nothing more could be done, but declined leaving the poor lady, who would not hear of leaving the deck, and a few cloaks were tossed to them with a despairing assurance of no danger.

The vicar did not like the manner of his parting friends, and when they descended to their berths, as they all did, had certainly no temptation to indulge his old habit of dozing ; so he fixed himself and his almost insensible charge as steadily as he could and his eyes upon the fore-cabin, whilst the night continued much the same—blowing rather hard, but never reaching to a storm.

Some time after midnight he saw a head steal

through the now moonlighted deck, and after examining the unabated weather, turn to a long observation of himself. Presently another head appeared, and then another, and he felt convinced the panic-stricken miscreants meant to desert their passengers. To put it beyond doubt he thought the best plan was to show he was awake, and he rose up, without seeming to observe them, and looked about him. The heads directly vanished, and he saw it was full time to execute another design of his own. Before they could take a second look he had untied the tow-rope and set the little boat adrift on the tide which was now running fast in shore, and in less than a minute carried it bounding out of sight. He then lay quietly down again, and seemed to go to sleep.

After a while they again showed themselves, apparently more resolute, and staggered to the stern, where they burst into smothered curses to see their last hope gone. Perhaps it was well that it was gone, for they would probably have committed any atrocity to secure it. Not suspecting the old man of such a sharp ruse, they were obliged to content themselves with another visit to the brandy cask, and returned to take their chance in their own quarters.

Daylight discovered there had been no danger but the danger inseparable from fear and incapacity. The wind had been fair all the time, and precisely what a sailor would have wished, for it was quite direct as it could blow, and might have carried them to the end of their voyage before they now recom-

menced it. The captain and his crew slunk upon deck as soon as they had got well of the brandy cask, and having assured themselves of their perfect safety, became braver than sea lions. They had only anchored to oblige their terrified passengers, for they rather preferred a hurricane, and so they patched up their rigging, and enjoyed the joke immensely.

But their sufferers had no mind to let them off so cheaply. Their sickness had performed its own cure, and both the gentlemen and the lady—especially the latter, who was the more angry for her personal dilapidations—set up such a roulade of wrath as never was heard out of France, and maintained that but for their friend who gave no account of himself they must have been buried deeper than the plummёт of the ‘Well Beloved’ ever sounded. It signified very little who he was or what he was; he had proved their *bon ange*, and they would publish to all the world that he had saved everyone of their lives as well as those of the poltroons to whom they had confided them. The altercation broke out again and again till they ran safely into Calais harbour, and there poor Mr. Bloomer found that notwithstanding all compliments and all triumphs at the near verification of his being the right man in the right place his troubles had yet to begin.

CHAPTER X.

AS soon as Madame and her compatriots saw themselves secure from the evil consequences that might have ensued from provoking the crew and their commander beyond all limits, the squabble was continued much more seriously. The angry lady had not been so unobservant of what passed in the night but her recollections in the morning retained it very carefully; and when the officers of the Douane came on board for passports and their customary search, and the porters and commissionaires had come alongside to take luggage to the Custom House and recommend lodgings and their own services, out she broke and out broke her friends, who had decided in consultation on the same prudential reserve. The first fit of defiance was a refusal to pay their passage-money in tones which exceeded all established usage, for it is a rule in France always to dispute the reckoning. And next came the reasons under a vast number of heads, the chief of which were that it was the highest of iniquity to send the old "Well Beloved" to sea, and

much more to carry passengers who had lives to lose ;—that the planks were leaky and went where they pleased, the ropes rotten and not fit to support a spider, the captain a *miserable* who had never sailed before, and the rest only qualified like himself to cut their passengers' throats, from doing which they had only been prevented by that *brave homme* who had cut the tow-rope instead.

Madame's gratitude had carried her a step too far, and attention was now entirely diverted to poor Mr. Bloomer, whose object to get away as fast as he could seemed postponed very indefinitely.

So, then, the loss was not accidental, but a horrible design to prevent all chance of rescue, and save himself from a worse fate on shore. Everyone had seen from the first that he was some runaway from justice, and would give no account of himself because he believed all the world a great *gens d'armes* in pursuit of him. He would be demanded by the British Government. They must detain him in prison, or prepare for a declaration of war. He had conspired against the French navy, and must go before the Minister of Marine, and, above all, he had imposed upon honest traders and refused to pay his passage.

The unfortunate vicar could make no head against so many accusers all at once, and his confusion and stammering proved, of course, that he had nothing to say for himself. In vain he declared he would pay whatever they pleased,—double, triple, quadruple—and give the French navy half-a-dozen boats;

for the one that would have drowned them all. Nobody understood him till he began to feel his pockets, and then their comprehension improved. But there was nothing in the first, and when he tried the second there was nothing still; another and another were equally unproductive, till at last he remembered the clothes he had left in the ready-made shop, and the lump of money he had left in them, with the addition of his handsome gold watch, and everything by which he might easily have proved his respectability. Every failure produced its shout of laughter, and finally his rueful expression on finding himself in a foreign country without a farthing to pay his way, produced a peal of wrathful hilarity not very surprising in those who took it all for a wonderfully well acted piece of hypocrisy.

The noise soon brought a superior officer on board to learn what was the matter, and being a man in authority and full practice he was not long in obtaining a hearing. He addressed the Vicar with grave politeness.

“Bon jour, monsieur,” he began.

“Bon jour, monsieur,” replied the simple-hearted culprit; much too simple to understand that he appeared in that character, and greatly relieved to find himself accosted by any one in his senses.

“Monsieur is lately arrived from London?”

“Just this minute, monsieur.”

“Has monsieur any friends in this country?”

"I am sorry to say, monsieur, I don't know yet : I am come to see."

"No friends ! very incommode, monsieur."

"Very much so, for I find I have left all my money behind."

"*Facheu !* does monsieur know where he left it ?"

"In my other clothes, in the shop where I bought these."

"It is to be hoped that monsieur knows the address."

Monsieur never thought of asking the name of the street.

"But the name of the marchand ?"

"God bless me ! I just remember——"

"What does monsieur remember ?"

"That I forgot to enquire."

"And monsieur has left his money and his clothes he does not know where or with whom ! perhaps he was in haste ?"

"That is my only excuse ; I certainly was in great haste."

"I hope monsieur will continue as well contented with that excuse. He is fortunate in being able to make so light of his accident ! will he deign to say what is his profession ?"

"*Oui*, monsieur. I am a clergyman."

The mob could not hear this from so unclerical a figure without a loud laugh.

"Silence, *je vous prie*, messieurs ! Do clergymen in England wear that sort of dress ?"

"Not exactly, monsieur, but my friends did not wish to part with me, and it was the only mode of escaping them."

"*Plaisant!* I am not surprised they wished to keep monsieur. We shall hope to keep him in Calais and see that his passport is *en regle*."

"Pas——!" Mr. Bloomer began to perceive from a dry sort of smile that he might possibly have misunderstood this polite gentleman.—"Pa-ssport! I forgot it!"

"*Parbleu, c'étoit un malheur!* we must take the advice of Monsieur le Juge du Pays, and Monsieur le Juge is gone to Paris and will not return for a month."

Mr. Bloomer's agitation increased. What should he do! He had said he was in great haste—he could not be detained.

"Monsieur must be patient—his passport is not the only thing wanted. He forgets that he has no money and something considerable to pay, besides giving a more precise account of himself. We must invite monsieur to accompany us to the Bureau, where his business will be properly attended to."

A result so unforeseen and overwhelming to the best of all plans which the poor Vicar, bristling to the point of every gray hair, had thought too good to be invented by any one else, seemed to operate upon his whole nature with a power little less than galvanic, but it showed itself more in surprise than anger. The whole edifice he had built so cunningly had tumbled about his ears at the very moment when

he was raising his flag at the summit, and from causes too insignificant for notice.

The Assizes that must have lived in a memory so luminous would now be chronicled in the darkest page of history and resign their light to the locked-up treasures of the *Juge du Pays*. There was no alternative but submission, for though a very small exertion of unimpaired intellect might probably have found a remedy, the wherewithal was not at his command.

The lookers on understood every sign of good feeling as a sign of alarmed conscience and, though the fair sufferer whom he had cherished through the night of horrors protested, whatever he had done, he was the best of *les bons anges*, and her friends were unbounded in their hopes that the *bon ange* would get well out of it, with unlimited promises of supplying his prison house with their choicest stores, he was impatient to march off with his guards, and begged they would lose no time in taking him where they would.

Madame favoured him with the emphatic embrace so orthodox amongst our demonstrative neighbours, the gentlemen scraped him with their beards, and his official friends announced that they attended monsieur's pleasure—and so Mr. Bloomer achieved his burning wish by placing a foot upon French territory, though whether he was "the right man in the right place" remains to be questioned. It looked very like the reverse.

We must not go through the whole catalogue of

troubles to which our Vicar was fated through many hours, the various transfers from one deputy dog in office to another to find some Oedipus who could make him out; and his highly suspicious resistance of all questions as to name, friends, and business in France. As we are not writing his history exclusively we must confine ourselves to such parts of it as we find connected with main events—amongst these may be reckoned a charge from the Mercantile Company who enjoyed the ownership of the “*Bien Aimée*,” supported by the captain, and his following in mortal haste to anticipate the charge against themselves. Being preferred by men of substance in that subordinate world it of course received attention greatly paramount to passports and empty pockets, and was listened to with shrugs and grimaces proportioned to a national outrage. Its particular service to our history is under two heads, the first being a fixed decision of what was to be done with him, and the second a security against being transported back to the custody of Mr. Badger, who had advertised a great reward for him in all the newspapers which arrived from England the next morning. The decision is anticipated as a commitment to prison, and there he at last obtained some gleam of better fortune in sympathy for his age and infirmities. He was placed in separate confinement, with which, under the circumstances, he would have been well enough content, if he had known how to get out of it, and allowed leisure to recover and revolve his

next proceeding. It was a dreary study, for there was nothing but his brain to revolve, and he awaited in blank suspense whatever fortune might further choose to do with him ; starving, but not sensible of it, and motionless as if he had been frozen. His first attention to any exterior object was to a bit of looking-glass over his empty grate, for there he was surprised to see a rough-looking burley man in a blue woollen coat and brown felt hat staring wildly at him and motionless as himself—who could he be, and what could he want there ? If the worn out prisoner had cared what happened to him he would have felt some fear. But the delusion was soon over. It was the same old skipper he had seen in the glass by the Tower Stairs, but he was sadly changed, and all his keenness was gone. Nevertheless, the sight did him a service, for it showed him the small likelihood of his lasting to protect the unhappy Lucy or ever seeing her again unless he took some care to preserve himself. But where were the means ? oh, for that decent black suit which the rogue of the “ ready made ” had so carefully locked up ! oh, for the pockets in which he might have packed all his misery if he only had them with the bait he had left there.

He turned to look again with some minuteness, for he was purblind and had left his glasses with his black waistcoat, and now he encountered another surprise. He saw the door behind him open and close after admitting an elegantly dressed lady all ribbons and ringlets, and as comely as

kindly intentions always ought to be, bearing a tray well furnished with delicacies and a stately flask.

"*Ah, mon bon ange,*" she cried, "you see I have not lost you. I have had an eye kept on you all day, for I do not forget last night, and here is the best dinner I can get for you till I know what you like better. Sit down, *mon cher,*" and she busied herself in disposing her supplies in the most tempting manner. "Sit down, for you must be dying for want of support, and I will talk to you whilst you dine, and consider with you afterwards how to get out of this doleful place—for none of us believe you have done anything to bring you here, and if you have it is no business of ours."

The Vicar could hardly recognise her under such vast improvement, and still less express his satisfaction at seeing her.

"Ah, Monsieur," she interrupted, "you would make me laugh if I were not more ready to cry. I serve my own feelings much more than I serve you, and all the thanks I will have are to see you sit down. You want friends," she continued, without allowing him to speak; "and though I have observed that you are not accustomed to take them from the bourgeoisie, there are times when any friends are better than none; know me at once as Madam Ambrosine, who keeps a café in this town, and our two compagnons de voyage as a worthy restaurateur and the honest master of a wine store in one of our back streets. Our season is rather slack just

now and we took advantage of a cheap conveyance to pay a few days' visit to Grande Bretagne ; and that's our history. If you want to know more, our excellent restaurateur sends you that fricandeau, and the other sends you the flask of chablis, and I myself am the fairy that has conjured up the *vol au vent* and the *soufflé*. Now you know it all, and if you won't eat I shall go away."

Mr. Bloomer, besides his great necessity, knew the best breeding was to obey her injunctions, and notwithstanding his cares and futile attempts to make himself understood at the pace of a French-woman, contrived to turn several minutes to apparent account. When he found it time to resist all further pressing, Madame put the tray aside for his supper, and told him to expect her again when he ought to breakfast, and then they sat *tête-à-tête* to discuss other business, preparatory to which she took a glance at the door and produced paper and pen, and ink.

"Prisoners are not allowed to write," she said, "but my café makes me a good many friends, and nobody cares to quarrel with me. You will not be interrupted whilst I am here ; write to England and tell them what has happened, and I will send the letter as soon as I leave you."

"*Mais—but—je ne desire pas.* I do not wish *à-à-qu'ils savoir*—tha-tha—that is to say *ou je suis*—whe-where I am."

"But Monsieur told me that he was married, and surely a wife may be trusted to send money and

protection, or rather to bring them herself; and what wife would betray a husband? Send for her, *mon cher*, and she will be here to-morrow night."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the Vicar, remembering that his French was not so good as Madame's English. "Madame sets me a good example of candour, and encourages me to confide a fact which puts my wife out of the question. The primary cause of all my misfortunes is this lady, who might possibly have made an excellent partner for anybody who could manage her, but was just about to be provided for by separate maintenance when I took my passage in the 'Bien Aimée.'"

"Ah, *ma foi*, then I am sure the blame is all her own, for whatever offence Monsieur may have committed against the law, I can see in his face that he is *aimable à merveille*!"

"Pardon me, Madame; I have not committed any offence against the law, and am come here to ensure its connection with justice. Discomfort at home is sure to drive people elsewhere for consolation, and in my own case the relief was sought in habits of intemperance. Wicked people took advantage of a long course of imbecility to wrong the memory of my dearest friend, and the happiness of a beloved adopted daughter, and I have set out in a fit of frenzy, because I think I shall here find the means of defeating their iniquities."

"Mon Dieu, I was sure you were *un excellent homme*, but if Madame *votre épouse* is unworthy,

there must be many others to befriend you. Think, *mon cher*, for we poor *bourgeoisie* who depend upon others, are nobodies, and your accusers are men of influence and implacable against your nation, because it outrivals their shipping trade. Money and importance does everything here as it does in most other places, and though I do not know that those that dispense justice go far enough to take pay for their judgments, there is too much deference to those who are able to give it. The *Juge du Pays* may come home again at any time, and, *Oh mon Dieu*, only imagine yourself disguised again, like a convict with a great chain round your leg!" and she hid the cruel picture from her eyes with a fountain of tears.

Mr. Bloomer's pulse was a little quickened. He had no answer to make but a rueful admission that there was not a soul to apply to, for though he had most devoted friends they were one and all decided that he was crazy and would force him back to their custody.

"Ah the *malheur*! but keep up your spirits, *mon bon ange*. My business obliges me to make good use of all my wits, and I have a happy thought at the service of most people. *Dieu merci!* I have one for you which will make Madame *votre épouse* whatever you desire. You mentioned a separate maintenance, and she seems to have had her own way long enough. You must write directly and tell her the amount will be regulated by what she does to deserve it. If she does nothing she will

have nothing. Maintain yourself *en homme*, for those who are self-willed are only ruled by a will that is stronger, and you will be amazed to see how suddenly some women are improved by a change of government."

She smoothed her sheet of paper on the table and placed the pen in his hand ; but the Vicar stared in affright and was more incapable than ever. Maintain himself *en homme* in the face of Mrs. Bloomer ! he had never ventured on such a thing in his life !

"Then it is time you did, *mon cher*. Do you not tell me the happiness of all you love is at stake, and would you sacrifice them to the terrors of one whom you have no reason to love at all ? And if you have not courage for a style which you have never practised I will tell you what to say."

The Vicar was very much disinclined and very much ashamed to appear so, for it was no doubt his duty to act as Madame advised him. He began a good many replies with a tremulous repetition of buts, and Madame looked impatiently for what was to follow them, but as nothing came she bethought her of arguments more cogent than the galleys.

"Monsieur has a beloved adopted daughter who *sans doute* returns his affection ?"

"Oui, Madame ! a most devoted child who has given every hour of her life to amends for the calamities I drew down upon my head by this unhappy marriage. Beautiful in person, seraphic in her feelings, and only just arrived at the age of twenty. Such is the being who has been under-

valued and neglected, and otherwise unkindly treated from her infancy, which has chiefly determined me to emancipate us both from society so uncongenial."

"And this treasure so good and so amiable, Monsieur has left to lament his absence and to doubt what has become of him; to imagine that he is perhaps dead, and she herself dependent solely on one who has ill-used her from childhood? Has Monsieur ever thought of what may be the consequence of such grief and such a prospect? Is he sure that it will not break such a heart. Is he sure that it has not broken already?"

The Vicar's eagerness to compass his great discoveries had left him no reflection on the cost thus suggested, and Madame felt almost alarmed at the emotion she caused. It was the more touching from every attempt he made to explain his reluctance, for it soon became clear that he was not actuated by the imbecile subordination in which husbands have occasionally been kept by their domineering helpmates, but by that feeling though feeble disinclination to give pain to any living creature, which had so sadly encouraged evil propensities whenever he might have restrained them.

"I see, *mon cher*," said his kind-hearted observer, "what you really are; there is no misunderstanding you, and instead of the terrible malefactor who has set the world on fire, you are too worthy of a better to live in it. Such people are too rare to be tortured into natures which are foreign to them, and I will

not have to reproach myself with any further attempt. I must see what can be done by means less distressing, and suspect I may even make some improvement on the plan so distasteful."

"Any other plan would be a mercy to me if it only gives me a day for the object that brings me and liberty to hasten back for the consolation or the triumph of my anxious child. I am a poor old broken-down man, and a very short time in this place would make all plans useless, but how I am to get out of it is as little to be dreamed as were the chances that got me in."

"You must not overpower yourself by thinking about it. My friends and I are not persons in high places, but we have a good will, which is sometimes better, and I hope I see my way to set you free with less delay than we should find in friends from home. The people here are engaged to treat our *bon ange* as well as they dare, and to-morrow I will bring tidings which I hope will make him happy. It is now time to take my leave; for some of those who were so forward to make the most of their authority pass their evening at our café, where they are much better people, and I have something to say to them. Adieu till you have had a good sleep, and look for me in the morning!"

In a few minutes after this, Madame Ambrosine was presiding over the sparkling attractions of her café, exchanging pleasantries with her numerous habitués, and as little occupied with graver matters as if she had none upon her mind. Perhaps it is a

tact more peculiar in French women than to any others and subjects them to a very mistaken appreciation in this country in which the superficial observation of a great many of us sets them down as mere frivolous lovers of pleasure. We believe the truth is that their inexhaustible vivacity gives to every occupation of their lives the character of a leading trait, and that very few of us are aware of the many cares through which it sustains them. Their minds are never asleep so long as they can keep their eyes open, and they live longer in half a life than the women of most other countries in a whole one. We do not speak of the high or the low, but of that class which give a nation its nationality, and there we find our light, considerate and compassionate Madame Ambrosine far more a creature of rule than exception.

She had seldom leisure to bestow more than a passing word or two upon any one supporter, though her popularity with all was not to be doubted, but she detained the friends of her voyage rather longer than the rest with a look of confidence which, as she passed them on, assumed a smile quite sweet enough to prove that her still attractive face must once have been beautiful. The mighty man of the customs, who had captured the redoubted Englishman, was one of her next admirers, for though she had expressed her opinion of him in no flattering terms on that occasion, he was not now on duty, and therefore not the same person. Something she said, when no one happened to be near,

which caused them to put their heads close together and part with a glance of intelligence, and then three or four others, who had made themselves conspicuous in disposing of the Vicar, took their turn for a cup of coffee or a glass of lemonade and went off, distinguished by rather more attention than Madame usually accorded them. But every one who made his way to her throne, retired, fully possessed with the conviction that no one else was so highly favoured, and no one had cause to be jealous. And so everything went charmingly, and at length the doors closed and Madame sought her handkerchief to wipe away a tear, for which none but herself could have seen a reason.

CHAPTER XI.

FAR different was the lonely lodgement of the Vicar through many hours of that despairing night, for he sat immovable and almost unconscious of what had happened to him, his senses flitting from a pale and patient angel, forcing a smile of forbearance on his folly and its fatal remedy, and protecting a sick bed from the reproaches of memory which had come too late. Flitting from this vision of self-sacrifice to another which vibrated through his helpless frame with more intensity, his eyes were glazed upon a simple tomb in his rude church yard newly embellished with a second sinless name, which changed the lament of too late to a shudder of too early. Other fragments of thought cut through his miserable old brain with neglected duties, evil examples, degraded name, hopeless future, and a tormenting fury, aping youth and beauty in the last new fashion and pursuing him for ever and ever with a diabolical quacking of Aylesbury ducks. Nothing that passed outwardly

could distract him from the motley confusion without, though lights were brought in and a bright fire kindled, and busy hands moved stealthily to make his bed. He would have shaken in his waking nightmare throughout the night if some kind hand had not taken him by the arm and laid him gently on a comfortable pillow, and a watchful eye regarded him till his visions died away and existence itself seemed to pass with them.

Whose was the cloaked figure that had stolen through the darkness to perform these Samaritan duties and continued wiping its eyes that a seemingly expiring effort to redeem the past should be so cruelly rewarded? Whose were the lips that had come breathless to cheer his last hours of confinement with far different thoughts for to-morrow and found all his faculties lost in delirium? How prone we are to call this world a bad one when, perhaps, we have never gone the right way to prove its goodness. Hard, because we have made no valid claim to its pity. Selfish, because we have had no need of its charity!

In the total prostration of the Vicar there was at least one advantage, for it made him sleep the sleep of a dead man far into the next morning, and when he opened his eyes to wonder where he was, there was the cloaked figure again intently watching the effects it had produced.

“*Bon jour, mon brave,*” said the cheerful voice of Madame. “How have you passed the night? are you able to take a journey to-day?”

“A j—j—journey! To the world’s end! what journey does Madame mean?”

“Wherever you wish to go. Your doors are open, and you have only to get up and breakfast whilst I go for your passport, and then we will set off together.”

“Set off! To—together.”

“Certainly; do you think I would let you go by yourself! Only tell me to what place it is to be *visé*, and as you will most likely have a great deal of talking you will want an interpreter, and somebody to see you take care of yourself.”

“For Boulogne—*visé* for Boulogne; but how has all this been done?”

“Never mind. Favour is cheap when we buy of subordinates who have no chance of a better market. They could gain nothing by sending you to the galleys, and something better by sending you about your business, *mon brave*; and so my friends and I made a small contribution to buy them a better conscience, and help you through what you have to do in France, and then back where that *enfant cherie* is so *desolée*. Adieu for a few minutes. Here is a better suit of clothes which my late husband never wore, and linen to last you home, and you shall have a new pair of glasses as we leave the town. You have nothing to think about, and I cannot stop for questions—so *au revoir*, *mon bon ange*, and eat your breakfast.”

She was gone whilst she spoke, and the Vicar jumped up to assure himself that all this was real.

His long sleep had done its good work, and his waking news had roused him to a new world; with such a beginning, Fate meant him to accomplish all he had undertaken, and by the time madame returned, the wild-looking old skipper—who must have borne a strong resemblance to the “ancient mariner”—was a respectable gentleman once more in black, and fortifying himself for a day of uncommon labours.

Taking upon her now the full charge of him as nurse and protector of a stray child, she felt she must know something more specific about him before she could render the further service he was sure to require, and Mr. Bloomer could have had no reservation from her, even if the time had not past for all apprehension of discovery. In a very short time he would learn, or despair of learning, all he looked for at Boulogne, and before the day should be over he hoped to be on his way back to Goldsworthy.

As soon, therefore, as their railway carriage without fellow-travellers, conveyed them beyond his scene of disaster, they were deep in a story, which, broken as it was by imperfect language and every infirmity of memory and feeling, madame declared to be the most affecting and the most *étonnante* she had ever listened to. The recital shortened the journey for both parties, for it did not end till they stopped at the last station before its conclusion.

Here they took in an elderly and pleasant-looking fellow-traveller, from whom madame immediately thought she might pick up information to their purpose, for she found by a word or two exchanged with the porter who let him in, that he resided at Boulogne, and heard him called Monsieur le Docteur. The very person to know everybody there, and those from England in particular, for the fine ear of a Frenchwoman in such matters very soon detected him for an Englishman himself.

"Monsieur," she observed, when they were again on their way, "has resided some time in this country?"

"True, madam," he replied, with a good-natured smile; "but not long enough, I perceive, to pass for your countryman, which I wish I could."

Madame bowed to the compliment, but protested that monsieur had mistaken her. She knew him for English from his uncalled for liberality to the man who let him into the carriage, and for a resident of some duration from the perfection of his accent.

And then Monsieur bowed, and said he was very much flattered; and the conversation was continued with mutual pleasure, for Frenchwomen of all grades above the lowest are undistinguishable by manner, and could not be commonplace if they would. The Vicar paid no attention, for to strangers on their first immigration across the Channel, however well they may have been in-

structed at home, a French conversation of any length seems nothing but one interminable word, with as little meaning as the roll of wheels.

He was moreover much overcome by the tale he had just told, and breathless with expectation of the adventures he was about to encounter. The first distinct word that seized his apprehension, was the name of Mr. Seymour, madame having, in devotion to her new interest, darted into the first opening for the subject so important to her *bon ange*.

“I have heard,” said Monsieur le Docteur, “that a gentleman of the name formerly did duty at the English chapel at Boulogne, but he left it some years before I took up my residence. Perhaps as I have friends there of much longer standing than myself, I may be able to obtain from them any information which madame desires.”

“Wha—wha—what does monsieur say?” burst in the roused Vicar, with an eagerness which much disposed Monsieur le Docteur to feel his pulse. “Monsieur Seymour is my oldest friend! I have ran away from all the rest and the greatest concerns of my life to find him! I have been advertised like a malefactor in the *Times* newspaper.” For he had procured it at the Calais station. “I have been lost and murdered—at least very nearly so—at sea. I have been put in prison on shore: I have had a narrow escape from the galleys, and now I will give the gray head from my shoulders to know where he is.”

Monsieur le Docteur looked significantly at madame.

"No, monsieur," said madame, fervently. "*Mon brave* is not an object for a *maison de santé*, though he has enough to make him so. He is an ecclesiastique of your own country, and believes Monsieur Seymour can assist him to unravel a great mystery relating to a Beau Frere who disappeared many years ago, under very strange circumstances."

"In that case," said the doctor, "I will do everything in my power to learn where Mr. Seymour may be found, and begin my enquiries as soon as we arrive. It occurs to me that there is something mysterious in our own churchyard, where I have often wondered what could be the meaning of a mound, with only a nameless stone at the head, surrounded by an iron railing. The clerk and the sexton, as well as the clergyman who at present officiates, and is one of three or four who have succeeded Mr. Seymour, know nothing about it but what they have heard from their immediate predecessors; and the story goes that many years ago, as you say, some unknown gentleman who never suffered his name to transpire, died at Boulogne, where his friends requested that no memorial should be raised till certain circumstances permitted them to cover his grave with a suitable monument."

"My brother-in-law! His name is on the coffin!"

"I should think not, since there is none upon the

head-stone. Allow me to ask, sir, how long is it since he disappeared."

"Twelve years," articulated the Vicar. "I have reason to remember the date, for it caused the death of my sister, and my own distracted head to think first of another mother for her orphan child!"

"The date, I believe, corresponds very nearly with the construction of those iron railings. My advice is that you go to the clerk, whom the people of the hotel where you put up will easily find for you, and obtain a sight of the register of burials, where the name of the friend you seek will appear, if it appears anywhere. Do this at once, and as soon as I have made my round of enquiries I will meet you where the deserted stranger lies forgotten."

The train was stopping at the instant, and the doctor, who felt much interest, took a hasty leave to perform his promise. Madame pronounced him another *bon ange*, and the Vicar at last placed a tottering foot upon his land of promise.

The clerk, who was of course an Englishman, from the office he filled, was shortly introduced to them, and proved obliging and intelligent, for having thought that nobody could want him for any purpose but to see the edifice in his charge, he had brought the key with him, and made no difficulty in acceding to an examination of the register; accordingly Mr. Bloomer, with one trembling hand upon his stick, and the other on the careful arm of

madame, stepped impatiently after their guide, who was not long in conducting them to the vestry. The great folio was produced; and the Vicar was too much agitated to put on his new spectacles, which madame did for him.

“Don’t flurry yourself, *mon brave*,” she said, in the touching tones she would have used to a child in a fever, “and don’t begin at the first page, for you could not devour them all without dying before you got to the right one. Think of the date you want, and Monsieur will turn to it at once.”

“T—t—twelve years ago,—twelve years ago.”

The clerk turned to his index and then to the place and frowned with surprise and discomposure. It was very singular, the important leaf was missing. He turned back and then forward, and then turned up the book to ascertain if anything loose had been restored to a wrong page. Nothing dropped out, and then he returned to the vacancy, where he frowned again. Closer investigation showed the neat operation of a penknife, and there was not a doubt that the page had been stolen. How could it be? Who could have done it? He was in consternation. He had never trusted the book out of his possession, and never shown it without a strict supervision. The Vicar looked stupefied, and the French lady more piercing.

“Never out of your supervision, Monsieur? In that case you must have cut the leaf out yourself, which nobody believes. Think; there must have been some one instance in which you went away or

went to sleep. This is an affair of immense consequence, and your memory may be recalled *affreusement*. Do many strangers examine this book?"

"Not one in a twelvemonth, madame, and, now I think of it, only one since I have been here."

"Ha! And do you know who it was?"

"No, madame. He was a gentleman from England."

"How long ago?"

"A long while. It might have been four years, and it might be three or four more, I cannot say," and the poor man seemed really frightened out of his recollections by that piercing eye, for Madame with the sensitive heart had her full share of the fiery spirit of her nation.

"You cannot tell us when, but you can tell us what sort of a person he was, old or young, tall or short, dark or fair, what he said, and how he was dressed? If Monsieur cannot answer here he will be questioned in another place."

"He was not young and not old; dark, I remember, not so tall as I am, but thicker set."

"His dress?"

"Very different from other travellers, and more like an English farmer. All fustian, or something like it, and worn rather slovenly."

"His conversation?"

"I only recollect he told me not to say that a gentleman of his description had been here, as he wanted to get back by the Dover boat, and I

might oblige him to call upon a great many friends."

Madame turned her eye upon the Vicar to see if he comprehended, and had ever known such a person, when all his energies united in a sudden burst of enlightenment.

"Cheek ! Cheek, the villain I have been sure of ! Cheek,—the only man who could wish to destroy the evidence of Sir Harry's death ! Cheek, who forged the lying pretext for denying a monument or a name to his grave ! Cheek, who has destroyed all he ever looked upon in this world, and shall now look upon nothing but the retribution of another ?"

The clerk, perceiving that his position became critical, bespoke indulgence by remembering the gentleman he mentioned had, he verily believed, delayed for hours over the register that he might tire him out and send him to sleep. Whether he had succeeded or not he could not say, but he feared it was possible that he might have just nodded a moment, because he wakened him before he left to give his last injunctions.

Mr. Bloomer's conviction being thus complete, the next trial that awaited him was a visit to the nameless headstone, at which he was to pay the tribute of his grief to the dear friend of his youth—the husband of his sister and the father of his beloved Lucy, and he had scarcely power to reach the small enclosure. He could not speak, and made no attempt for some time, but continued looking down as if his

eyes would have penetrated the earth, and his considerate friend of a day, who might truly have applied her term of a good angel to herself, motioned their guide to stand apart and not disturb him. At length he turned slowly towards her and spoke a few subdued and broken words.

"I have found him! It is he! I know it from a kindred feeling which springs from this sod. He was my younger and should have gone after; he had no fault, but too much goodness, and for this they did worse than murder him, for they charged his memory with the murder of another. I have but one thing to do before I die, and Heaven will not desert after helping me so far. There is judgment on the trace of his maligner. When? not to-morrow—no—the day after—the day after—my place is in England." He drew a deep breath, and then continued, "whatever tidings that stranger brings us, I must leave you to-night, but you shall hear of me ere long, and perhaps you will not have seen me for the last time; but it is best to lose none in praying God to bless you!"

All this was said without seeking to make it better understood by foreign assistance, and so free from agitated stammer that Madame could follow it distinctly. Perhaps the reason was that assured sorrow is calmer than its apprehension. She did not attempt to answer him, for there was no argument to use against such a resolution, though it was a struggle to maintain silence under the certainty that an old man in whom she had taken so

much interest, though only for a few hours, could never live to effect the good for which he had endured so much. She felt conscious that she looked upon him for the last time and returned his blessing far less firmly than he had given it, and now their late travelling companion returned with the result of his inquiries.

"I am sorry," he said, "to tell you that Mr. Seymour died many years ago, but he left a widow who is still living, and residing in the country within a league of us. As I know your impatience, I have brought my own carriage and will be your conductor."

The comparative repose we have noted again gave place to the restless flush and palpitation which had before seemed lighting and hastening Mr. Bloomer's downward progress, and the doctor regarded his condition very seriously.

"I expected," he said, "that this approaching close of great perturbations would increase their violence and have therefore been the more anxious to get them over, but it is a time to be candid, and tell you that you must assist me manfully, for you can do more for yourself than I can do for you. Your appearance shows me that you have suffered much of late from illness which was properly the doctor's province, but that is well over; a worse remains which requires a more combined effort. If our visit to day is fortunate I have no fear for you, you will right yourself like the tottering tree when the tempest is over; if otherwise, you must endure

like a good and Christian man which your exertions prove you to be, and resign yourself to the thought that Providence has rendered them abortive for some good purpose of its own, and that you have an equal duty to preserve yourself for the consolation of griefs which you cannot remove. In the latter case, with time and rest, I have no despair of our remedies, but I am bound to say on no other condition."

"T—T—Time and rest," replied the Vicar, as disordered as ever, "are not for me ; a day at home is of—of more value to me than an age of doubtful absence, and happen—happen what may, I return to-night. If there is no—no better conveyance, the frailest fishing boat, storms, quicksands, desertion to my fate, no matter what. To-night if I live ; tomorrow would be too late."

The doctor and Madame exchanged looks of more than doubt, and signs that persuasion must defeat its own end.

"Come then, *mon brave*," said the latter, mournfully, "you shall not be *contrarie*. Bear up at least till we see Madame Seymour, and then we will help you in anything you please."

"Madame is right," the desponding doctor admitted, "there is no time to lose. Let us lead you to the carriage, and trust that Mrs. Seymour may perform some wonder which we cannot divine."

Having followed the Vicar so far in pursuit of a hope which had been vague and extravagant in all eyes but his own, and perhaps might still have been

thought nothing more than the conjuration of a brain that would bear no contradiction, we should feel a melancholy concern in following him still and seeing how far sinister auguries are fulfilled, but other interests compel us to be content with having accounted for his strange disappearance when perhaps we may be very near the conclusion of his history. At all events we leave him in good hands, and with no doubt of hearing further particulars, which we hope may be better than we expect.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM this desponding without the walls of Lympton we turn to the state of hope within them, and to Messrs. Cox and Cheek. To the last first, because he was, in some sort, the gentleman of the house ; having in his days of judicial eminence, taken his turn on the rota as visiting magistrate. He was a great man then, and the turnkeys and the culprits bowed and shivered before him ; but great men, like the great individual who once made a flight through chaos, sometimes diminish as they rise, and Mr. Cheek had risen high enough to become a very small one when he soared into the domains of Mr. Bolt ; the gentleman whom we left, a short time ago, handcuffed to the bars of a dungeon.

His arrival had been very late in the night, or rather in the first hours of the morning—the most cheerless to the worn traveller ; and worn enough was Mr. Cheek. Bravado had stood its ground manfully, but the last ten miles had done its business ; a grim procession through narrow stone passages, with a dying lamp at intervals to show

how dark they were, had nothing reviving in it, neither had the chill small resting-place, with its grated window and truckle bed, in which his long-projected day of triumph concluded. As he dropped into his hard wooden chair, he seemed not to know where he was, till he recognized the leader of his escort, who remained when the rest were gone, to hope he had the honour of seeing his worship pretty well.

Mr. Cheek was not very conscious of how he returned the compliment, but Mr. Bolt was encouraged by his condescension to be talkative, and expressed his great pride in having charge of so distinguished a criminal; for criminal and prisoner were, in Mr. Bolt's acceptation, synonymous terms. He was happy to think that his worship would be better satisfied with the prison discipline than he used to be, for his representations had all been attended to, and all those indulgences he had disapproved of were quite done away with. Prisoners were now treated as they deserved to be, and taught to know that prison was not so pleasant a place as they used to find it before his worship took them in hand. "We don't allow our big coves now-a-days to live like fighting cocks, but keeps 'em in healthy condition, as the doctor says, and improves their minds with short commons and long hexortations, parson ditto. And then, that judge as your worship used to call a old woman, a cause he let everybody off, is gone dead, and we have Judge Raven now, as hangs 'em up like strings of onions. Good night, or morning,

sir, whichever you like best: you'll be quite delighted with your improvements."

His worship did not relish solitude, though he was scarcely up to company, and detained his comforter with something more to say, though he did not exactly know what it was. He was very much gratified, very, to have done so much good. He had tried hard to have Mr. Bolt promoted to a higher grade and better salary, and hoped he had succeeded in that also.

"Oh, yes, sir, thank'e kindly. I'm head man now, and pretty well off; but they never told me it was you as made me so. Anything I can do, sir, except let you go. Would you like to have a Psalm-book to amuse you, sir? Or the last Newgate Calendar, or a few last dying speeches?"

"Except let me go—of course," replied Mr. Cheek, with a twinkle, and somewhat in the tone of a question—"You are a capital officer, Bolt; and I dare say a thousand pounds—or two—would have no influence whatever over you?"

"Oh, none, sir, not a haporth! Don't you beafeared of my honesty; for, since that last escape there's been double watch, and we all takes care of one another's conscience."

"Of course, Bolt, of course. I'm sure of it. And yet—three thousand pounds is a great deal of money!"

"A lot, your worship, to any body as wouldn't be transported for taking it. But then, you see, there'd

be three thousand certainties of getting blowed and honest men can't afford that."

"No, Bolt; but clever ones never are."

"And yet, you see, sir, your worship is; and so's Cappen Cox! Hope you'll sleep well, sir. Chapel at seven o'clock; then breakfast, according to your own regiment; then a walk in the Quadrangle; then private hexortation. But it's all soon learnt, specially by them who knows it afore, as your worship does. Wish you a pleasant night, sir. Only hear how slick the locks and bolts turns, since your worship had 'em altered!"

We are afraid the night was not very pleasant, for Mr. Cheek sat as he was till daylight. His affairs were too pressing to waste the time in sleep; and yet, the more he considered them the less he knew what to do. He was a bear that had fallen into a pit, too steep to be got out of, except by the help of a rope. What he had heard before the magistrates convinced him of it. Aaron, whom he believed to have escaped, would no doubt be taken, and turn king's evidence; Bunckle was promised; Mother Bloomer was sure; Crowley was the most popular man in the country, and would have all the Goldsworthy interest to back him; whilst there was no lawyer rogue enough to undertake the defence but Moses Pinhorn. To Moses, therefore, he must write, which he did, the next day; but the letter did not reach him till after he had been bound to appear for the prosecution. He wrote to say he

would do what he could, but felt the case to be very dangerous.

This being a correct foretaste of several days following we need not continue the relation of Mr. Cheek's life in retirement, of which the only incidents were the visits of Mr. Bolt, who never failed to offer such comfort as he thought conducive to resignation.

Captain Cox, who (thanks to Aaron), had all this time enjoyed a comfortable quarter in the hospital, was not delivered over to Mr. Bolt till the day before the trials, when he was established next door to Mr. Cheek, and received the same attention.

"Hope I see you well, sir," said Mr. Bolt, in his afternoon call. "You'll be glad to hear we have got more company since you went to the 'firmary—a gentleman as says he's a friend of yours."

"Who? Which of 'em?" cried the ghost of the once pulpy captain; "I've plenty that ought to be here."

"Aye, sir, so has most of us. But this is one you wouldn't ha' thought of—one as was a great martin cat about our discipline a while ago, though he don't much like it now, and they do say he'll go to the drop. By Dad, it's enough to make one laugh."

"Who, you grinning thief? Tell us who?"

"Well, sir, your next door neighbour is his worship, Christopher Cheek, Esquire."

"Cheek? What, Cheek? Impossible!"

"True for all that, sir, though you'd hardly know

him if you was to see him, for he don't look half such a great man as he used to."

"Cheek! By Jove, here's good news at last! What's he in for?"

"Oh, nothing low, sir; he's a great gentleman still, in a sort of way. He's in for murder."

"Murder! That's something like; who has he murdered?"

"Mr. Crowley, the new justice what committed you."

"He? No, sure? Say it again! It can't be! Crowley?"

"As sure as you are Cappen Cox."

"By the Lord, this is glorious! Here, I've a sovereign still; let us drink a good swing to him in a bottle of aquafortis!"

"Aye, but him as he murdered ain't dead yet, though it's all the same for Squire Cheek; for that new law for cheating Mr. Ketch out of so many fees ain't passed, and crimes is crimes the same as they used to be. You're to be tried to-morrow, they say, and then, you know, you've a right to another day, and as Sunday goes for nothing, you've got all the while till Monday morning."

The sudden sparkle of the Captain at his proposed carousal was as suddenly extinguished, and Mr. Bolt was obliged to continue his consolations.

"Don't you be downhearted, sir, for I was going to wish you joy. The nearer your trial the nearer your deliverance, one way or t'other, according to chances; and as you have lived so long upon chances,

that's good news, anyhow. But if I was you I wouldn't lay any long odds this time, acause there's a terrible chaffing about 'em in the town, where every spare bed is to hold half a dozen, and there aint standing room in the street for so much as nothing at all. Hundreds of gents from some place they calls the Corner are glad to get a mount upon the lamp-posts, and there they are betting two to one agin you ; I never heered such a row. Lincoln, they say, the best jockey going, is to ride Prosecution ; and Heavisiide, what rides Defence, is heavy enough to break his back. Good arternoon, sir ; we begins at nine o'clock to-morrow. Oh, I forgot,—there's a little gent with an order from the governor, who says he's your lawyer."

" Moses Pinhorn ?"

" That's he."

" Curse you ! Why couldn't you say so at first ? Show him in and show yourself out, bloodhound !"

" That's your sort, sir ; keep your spirits up. I'll send him in, and do the friendly next door."

He turned the key behind him with an imitative click of his tongue, and the Captain sank shivering upon his scanty iron bedstead, which, as far as it was bare, looked very like a gridiron. There he sat, with his head between his knees and his fingers thrust through his tangled hair, not unsuggestive of a nest of vipers coiling out of a brain too hot to hold them. Tossing on a tide without a shore,—borne sinking or swimming, he knew not which or

whither, till Moses was thrust in to perform the office of that celebrated mouse that gnawed the net of the lion.

The advent of this intimate friend was rather late, considering the crying occasion for him; but, having been duly apprised of all the particulars, he had seen no need for haste and only one mode of defence, which might be more convenient to himself at the last moment. Having received a welcome not remarkable for its flattery with the well-seasoned patience that had seldom been rewarded by anything better, except his profits, he expressed his concern for his good friend, and looked as hopeless as he could.

"Moses," cried the half dead scarecrow, "here's the last day almost over. Unroll yourself, and let us see the jewel in the toad's head. What can you do?"

"Truly," said Moses, "I have never seen a prospect so discouraging since Jonas was swallowed by the whale?"

"Come out of your synagogue! Your whale has swallowed me more than three days, and I want your miracle!"

"Miracles do not come as they came of old; their ways must be paved with shekels."

"To hell with your shekels, and let us understand you. I wrote you what I offered to Goldfield, and what his answer was. Now come to the point at once, for I don't mean to wait!"

The fever of his fears was catching. Moses could come to no point but a quick point for the door, which was safely locked again.

"Stop, Jew ! I'm not mad, but not far from it. Hark, you ! It is time we understood each other. You have had me at your mercy for many years, and small mercy would it have been if you could have carried out your plans without me. Have you not hinted a thousand times that I was a mere man of straw, and that time, without some miracle, must make me nothing at all ? Have you not said that miracles were dear, and only to be bought by half a man's substance ? And what else do you mean by your shekels ? You see, I understand you. Do me this miracle and name your price !"

"Now, heaven be praised ! I was frightened for your reason ; but you are pacified, and we may talk pleasant. You are to be tried to-morrow upon two different counts, either of which would send you to the Antipodes, and both together, a few cubits farther. You have only yourself to consult whether it is best to escape them and live with half your substance, or lose all by this legal condemnation."

"Can you prevent it ?"

"Not by your law, and only at great risk for defeating it, which I will do on conditions. If I fail, they will be of no consequence to you, for you will be in a world much better than this ; if I succeed you can afford them. I have prepared a bond which only requires your signature. The deed to which it

relates, and which is fatal to your heirship at law will now be cancelled, and we will fairly destroy it in the presence of each other. I have brought it down for that purpose."

"Get me pen and ink!"

"I have them here. I might have made better terms, but I have no heart to take advantage of a friend's distress. That paper gives me no more than half of what I may secure to you."

Moses heaved a sigh, and the Captain dashed off his name.

"And now, Moses, what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Goldsworthy."

"To Goldsworthy! I tell you I have tried that already!"

"But not the right person. I have some knowledge of the state of that house from a damsel in my own, who has a sister staying there--or one that she calls so."

"Heaven help you, if she is the one I saw!"

"Whatever she may be, she will furnish pretexts for a visit, and she is the bosom friend of her who charges you on both these counts--the daughter of Sir Harry Longland."

"And then; what will you make of that?"

"The maid, Longland, is under heavy obligations to the mother of the Goldfield, who is in great trouble for her son, whose bills you are willing to restore. The Longland lady may save them from ruin by not appearing against you. Do you understand me now?"

The Captain's benighted eyes burst into brilliant illumination ! The dark horse was the first favourite ! The drowning man betted two to one upon the straw, and Moses set off upon his mission.

Alack ! there were chances against him which he never contemplated, and to show what they were we must pass him on his journey ; arriving at Goldsworthy whilst the afternoon was still sunny. There was only one figure in the saloon ; a very pretty one in a very disconsolate mood. This was pretty Polly Lightfoot ; and if her bright eyes were more bright than usual with a few liquid brilliants it was no great wonder, for the only hearts that had taught her to love them had cause to be more sad than her own. But presently she wiped away her tears and tried to look cheerful, for she heard a hand upon the door, and speedily found herself in the presence of Tom Philpot.

The only hearts that had taught her to love them did we say ? Well, Polly knew more about it than we did.

“ Oh, welcome ! ” she exclaimed, “ after these many days. What tidings do you bring of Aaron ? ”

“ Alas, none ! I have come to report an entire failure. Every village, house, hut, or hiding place has been searched without finding a trace. But I am still of Mr. Crowley’s opinion that he is not dead, for every inch of the ashes about Cheek’s

premises has been turned over and not a scrap of him has come to light. Where is Mr. Crowley?"

"Gone to give evidence before the Grand Jury at Lympton, and we are dying to know if they find true bills. He will wait for Mr. Badger, who telegraphed this morning that he could not be there till the last train, and should want him to attend to one of the witnesses till he is called in court."

"Which of them?"

"We do not know."

"Who is to conduct you to-morrow?"

"The Lord Lieutenant and the Sheriff have both called to say they will be in waiting for Lady Goldfield at a private entrance."

"How are Lady Goldfield and Miss Longland?"

"Distracted! I have left Lucy toiling for a moment's rest. Lady Goldfield has wandered into the garden; I believe to take a last look of the scenes in which she hoped to pass the remainder of her dear life. We have no business to be curious, but we have both of us suspicions which cause us a new misery. She has been talking to us about the pleasures of many places abroad, and we fear she is resolved to relieve Lord Goldfield of his troubles by parting from Goldsworthy."

"Part from her home! Does Lord Goldfield know this?"

"Less than any of us. He never leaves his room, for as fast as his health gets better his mind gets

worse. He has more leisure to look round him and see the wide ruin he has caused whilst he imagined he was only risking his own. The suffering of a noble mother, who never thinks of herself but always of him, appears, at times, to sting him into frenzy. One while, he is all spirit, and full of projects to push his way in the world like other men ; and then comes the honour of his family which he feels he has degraded past redemption ; his mother's peace of mind destroyed for ever ; imaginary curses of wronged dependents, defrauded of their just expectations ; the scorn of his high connections for a son so degenerate ; the pity, the contempt, the derision of all the world, who will hold him up as a warning till his name is forgotten. All this might form sound hopes for the future, if a future is in store for him ; but I feel frightful doubts of whether he will give it fair play."

"Good Heavens ! You think he may be rash enough——"

"I tremble every moment he is left to himself ; and I am not the only one who does so. Lady Goldfield and Mr. Crowley are almost always with him, and often take Lucy and me, but—I wish you would go up to him. He often asks for you. You have been a favourite ever since he was a boy, and hunted with your father."

"Who is with him now ?"

"I do not know. I could not go by myself. I hope his servant."

Tom became nervous. It was a day of uncom-

mon agitation, and therefore a very dangerous one. Hard as it was to sacrifice the happy moment of confidence which, of late, he had so seldom enjoyed, he made no more inquiries, and was gone without a word.

CHAPTER XIII.

JUST as he mounted the stairs and entered a grand gallery of bed-rooms, he saw the young lord rushing madly out of one of the doors, with a letter in his hand, and dashing into his own, which he slammed behind him. The first was left open, and Tom saw as he passed it, that it was not a bed-chamber, but a lady's boudoir. On the table was an open desk, which appeared to have been rifled, for letters and various papers were scattered about it. It was an odd circumstance, and the action of Lord Goldfield made it alarming.

In his momentary pause there was a light at the farther end of the gallery, now dim with the dusk of evening, and a servant came up by a back staircase, with candles for his master's room. He stood still to see whether he came out; and in a few seconds he did so, with an intimation that he would not be wanted again. Tom then advanced, and announced himself with a knock. He was rather impatiently desired to come in.

The young man was seated, as we have before

seen him, at a table covered with papers, but he was more pale and disordered, and hurriedly threw down a pen, and the letter, blank side uppermost, over something he desired to conceal. His dressing case, very sumptuously furnished with everything an extravagant taste could think of, stood open at his elbow, and the first object to catch a curious eye was a beautiful little travelling pistol, let into the velvet padding of the lid, with a vacancy for its fellow. It was no hard matter to conjecture what was under the letter.

“Excuse my impatience to ask how you do, my lord. I was engaged to dine here as soon as I came back from a run after a stray witness, and thought you would like to hear how I prospered.”

“I am very glad to see you, Tom Philpot,” was the answer, in a hoarse and hollow voice; but he seemed to have no curiosity, and talked of himself with rapid and fierce hilarity.

“Look what a man of business I am! I have been squaring my accounts here, and have found a way to pay them. Nothing easier, though I’ve had a hard study for it. Look at all these figures, dancing over a fellow’s brain, like fire-flies at midnight, and fancy what a blessing is the small ray of daylight that sweeps them all away.”

Tom was a very literal genius, but he understood the figure of speech well enough by the help of the something under that letter. There was no question but he had come at a critical moment, but what was he to do now he was there? Before he

could make up his mind, the young lord tried to resume, but only got so far as "I wish," when he stopped, as if he could not trust his voice.

"What do you wish, my lord?"

"I wish," he went on, more slowly and gloomily, "I wish my dear mother had another son."

"And why so? It is enough, I should think, for life to depend on one."

"No—no, Tom; you do not know her. She is too good to depend for life upon anything but the will that gave it. She might have had a better son than I have been, for I have caused her small happiness."

"She is probably the best judge of that, for pardon me if I say that the uncalculating disposition which you have just now lamented is quite as unlikely to estimate your claims as your shortcomings. I fear I speak freely, but your lordship must recollect what I was a little while ago, before Lady Goldfield and Mr. Crowley raised me up."

"Tom, you were a gentleman always, and I wish my mother's son had been such as you."

Tom affected to laugh.

"Lady Goldfield would have had little reason to be proud of him, my lord; but she would have had a son who would have died for her."

"She would have had more; for I can do that myself."

"Yes, my lord, and take her with you."

"What a son Crowley would have made her! What an heir to my noble-minded father! Oh,

Tom, if God had only made him my elder brother, I should not have lost myself. Then my greatest ambition would have been to ride foremost with your harriers, as I used to do, when home for the holidays."

He started up and paced the room, as if he stamped on fire.

"God Almighty, I must not think! I cannot be worse than this! What think you, Tom—what think you? She is in treaty to offer up Goldsworthy as a sacrifice to Moses and Cox. To pay the penalties of my Derbies and my Legers with her last earthly comfort. Who has brought her to this? Who?"

"My lord, sit down, I beg. You'll bring your fever back!"

"I wish I could, Tom; I wish I could; for then I was mad. Where is she, my good fellow? She is not ill?"

"Never less so. Lady Goldfield is in the gardens."

"Amongst the flowers she planted for thieves to wear! In the gardens. I wish I could see her—just this once."

He went to the window, to which Tom's eye followed him, to see it was closed and securely fastened; and whilst he stood there, silent and shaking, there was a moment to turn up the letter, over which a glance sufficed to show that it related to the sale of Goldsworthy. At the bottom were scrawled the words, "Adieu, dearest mother."

Where it had lain lay the missing pistol. Tom twisted off the cap, and supplied its place with a smear from the wax candle, upon which he let down the hammer, and replaced it under the letter, as before.

"I cannot see her," said the young lord, returning to his seat, with a look more wild, and visibly impatient for his friend to take leave. "You will be late for dinner, Tom. It is time to get ready. The first bell has gone."

"If you permit me, my lord, I would rather stay with you; for you do not seem quite well."

"It is nothing. This fever is intermittent. I am quite well now."

Tom hesitated whether to charge him with his intention, or seem to trust his words and calmer demeanour; reserving to himself the liberty of listening if he tried his pistol. The latter plan seemed the least hazardous, and he went out, with as small appearance of mistrust as he could assume, taking care to leave the door ajar. He had scarcely waited a second when he heard a sound like the tic of a watch, and, immediately after it, the dull fall of the hammer. He rushed back, and found Lord Goldfield hastily extricating the fellow weapon from his dressing case. He was just in time to catch his arm, and the struggle he had expected commenced in earnest; one striving, with the fury of a maniac, to direct the muzzle to his head, and the other to wrench it aside. Tom succeeded, and quickly insured safety by pulling the trigger. The foiled

madman flung himself back in his chair, as if his last hope was to dash out his brains.

The report was echoed back by a faint shriek in the distance. It had only been loud enough, in so large a mansion, to reach the apprehensive ears of Polly Lightfoot, who was just then undergoing the polite attentions of Mr. Pinhorn. Before he could ask what was the matter, she had vanished through the door and was bounding up the stairs. Moses, for his own sake, was seized with the same terror, and followed her; but she was too fleet to be overtaken. Tom had not closed the door, and heard her coming.

"Here is no harm," he said. "A pistol went off by accident. Say nothing about it; but run and send his servant."

She continued her flight down the back way; and Tom turned to Lord Goldfield, as much like death as a living man could look. Seeing him completely overcome, and scarcely conscious, he secured the pistols, and raised the sash to let out the smoke and prevent all suspicion. He then sat down beside him, and gently placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"My lord," he said, "wake up! You have had a troubled dream."

Lord Goldfield raised his eyes as dreamily as if the tale had been a fact.

"Dream? Dream, do you say?"

"A very terrible one, my lord, as it seemed. A dream and a fit at the same time. A relapse of

your late fever. I had much ado to prevent you from dashing yourself to pieces!"

"Good God! A fit! How real it seemed! Are you sure it was a fit?"

"Of course! How could I be deceived? I was told you were often suffering from delirium, but we thought the time past. You must be very quiet, or we may have it back again."

"I cannot think it was either dream or fit. I remember it so distinctly!"

"We often do; I have had dreams as vivid as reality."

"This surely *was* reality!" And he brushed his hair from his eyes, with a hand still violently shaking. "I talked of a new mode of paying my debts to the Jew? No? Something about fireflies and daylight, and so on?"

"Something of that sort; but I could not understand it."

"It is very strange! I went to the window to throw myself down at my mother's feet, but found it shut and fastened!"

"How could that be? It is wide open!"

"And so it is! I tried to shoot myself, and had an awful wrestle with you?"

"And yet, there you are; sitting quietly in your easy chair!"

"Tom, I must be mad! I am ready to take my oath to all this!"

"I can prove it impossible in four or five words. No one more truly loves the best of mothers. How

then in your sober senses, could you have transformed yourself into a monster, savage enough to strike her dead upon the spot ? What train of reasoning could have satisfied a sane mind that a few thoughtless inadvertencies could be redeemed by the deepest and most unnatural of human crimes ? For Heaven's sake, my lord, do not think yourself that monster ! That carrion, coward thing that shuns a little trouble to leave all who love him to despair and horror ; that changes a tomb of honour for a hole in four cross roads, with a faggot stick crammed through his accursed carcase ! That bloody phantom of darkness that scares honest men from his nameless pile of stones, and makes us tremble by a Christmas fire side ! No, no, no ! You have only to think of this, and be assured there has been no danger of such realities here !”

The young lord hid his face in his hands, abashed and humbled ; but whether fully convinced that he had been dreaming is more than we can vouch. However, he contested the matter no more, and was muttering a piteous injunction that the story should never be breathed to his most beloved mother, when, raising up his eyes in apparent thankfulness, he uttered a piercing cry.

“ Hold me, Tom, hold me ! The dream is coming back ! Look there ! It is the fiend come to fetch me before I am due ! Look at that cringing skeleton, bowing and making mouths at the door !”

Tom stared, almost in dismay, for he had ex

pended so much courage in his last speech that, as Mrs. Toogood said of her wisdom, he had hardly any left. They were both springing up to lay hands on the apparition, when it made a timid step forward.

"I am afraid, gentlemen," it said, "I intrude rather abruptly. I am a Hebrew gentleman, come from my kinswoman, Miss Pinhorn, to pay my respects to Miss Lightfoot, who left me in this large gallery, which is so dark I cannot find my way back."

"Pinhorn ! a Hebrew ?" cried Lord Goldfield. "Is your name Moses ?"

"Moses, sir, if it please you."

"Moses, the friend of Cox ?"

"Captain Cox is my good friend, sir."

"And my name is Goldfield, my good friend. You are just the good friend I wanted !" With which he clutched Mr. Moses by the collar, and dragged him to the table. "Look here, my good friend, and brighten a Jew's eye with the quintessence of Tantara Castle ! Here in these hieroglyphic papers are wrapped up the home and the acres of twenty noble generations, all consolidated in a few sheets of sixty per cent. compound interest. Look, my Judas, at the forty pieces for which you have swapped your soul, and paid your passage out of that window, or over the bannisters, whichever you think most agreeable."

Moses found he had got amongst the Philistines

with a vengeance. He was too much aghast to express any preference, and had only breath to petition for a little patience whilst he took his oath.

“Take your oath you will go by one route or the other, and I promise you that for once in your life you shall not be foresworn. Take a view first of the bloodless beggar from whom you have drained the last drop of the Goldfields. When nothing is left how can you hope for mercy? When you have hollowed the bones what can you expect but the echo of your own sentence? By Heaven, Moses Pinhorn, you must be a Judas Maccabeus to brave my hands with all these villanies against you!”

“I’ll take my oath——”

“To worship the Golden Calf, and graze him on the lands of Tantara. Look here, I say, look on these hellish scrawls! Three hundred thousand at sixty per cent. for barely forty thousand received! Three hundred thousand at compound interest till I can pay it off and build another Temple for Solomon!”

“I’ll take my oath——”

“To tempt the downy spendthrift with a few grains of gold to the iron cage from whence he may whistle ruin to the wretched bird that hatched him.”

“I’ll take——”

“Blood, bones, and brains; hopes here and hereafter; misery, madness, and compound interest!

Take all ; and take them to help your downward passage from window or bannister, for a Christian keeps his promise !”

“ But not un-Christian ones,” interposed Tom.
“ Hear what he takes his oath to.”

“ I’ll take my oath I never lent his lordship a penny !” cried the terrified Moses. “ By Abraham, I have not a single claim against him.”

“ By Isaac, you are a lie nearer to perdition ! What say you to this ?” and he snatched from the table the last letter from Cox, which he read with due emphasis, and something extra on the passage for Moses—“ Moses Pinhorn is clamorous for instant payment of the many thousands he lent you, and swears he will make you a bankrupt next week ! What say you to that, my good friend ?”

Moses was rigid to his fingers’ ends. “ I never lent a penny to your excellent lordship, nor to him for your lordship’s accommodation. You gave your notes of hand to Cox, and all I know of them is that he gave them to me to obtain payment.”

It was now the turn of Lord Goldfield and Tom to be rigid.

“ Why, how is this,” said the latter, who was most possessed of his senses, “ these words are written by Cox himself ?”

“ Then Cox is a false hypocrite, and has lent monies upon usuries he is ashamed of, and made me his scapegoat.”

"And is this what you swear to?" demanded Lord Goldfield.

"By all the patriarchs."

"My lord," said Tom, "nothing is more credible. If Cox had practised this extortion in his own name, he must have lost his influence to tempt you onward!"

"By my life that's true! Is this another dream?"

"Let it not trouble your good lordships. We are used to wrong, and it is our custom to return good for evil—I will prove it on the neck of this heathen. I will show that you do not owe him enough to pay Beelzebub for his brimstone, and you shall walk out of the court to-morrow as free as my Lord Judge! I have said it, and now, if I can pleasure you no more, I will pray this gentleman," for the servant had been waiting in the background, "to show me down *the stairs*. I have business with Captain Cox and must see him before the prison is shut up." Whereupon he darted out on his mission of good for evil.

Lord Goldfield was confounded. "Tom, what think you of this?"

"I think there is an old saying that when rogues fall out honest men come by their own."

"By Jupiter, it may be so, though I cannot see how."

"Trust to your lawyers, my lord — there is something in these assertions worth a consultation."

“ We'll have it, Tom, we'll have it. In the mean-time we must go down and comfort my mother—my poor mother—before she hears news of my deeds and my dreams.”

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY GOLDFIELD had continued strolling in the gardens and musing over the many recollections of the days she had passed there, and the many changed prospects of those which might remain to her, till it was almost dark. It was a solitary instance of such indulgence since she had first come to the resolution of immolating her happy home to the evil genius of her son ; for, never since her conference with Mr. Badger had she allowed such thoughts to weaken her sense of what high principle and enthusiastic notions of honour demanded of her. She had never changed from her first resolution that having pledged himself to ruin, no matter for whose benefit, her son was bound to meet it. Her correspondence with the lawyer had so convinced him that he had, for the first time in his practice, found a client who could look down upon legal chances more decidedly than others looked up to them, that he had been in constant dread of her placing herself in worse hands, and finally ceased to remonstrate. The letter which

Lord Goldfield had taken from her desk was to acknowledge the receipt of the title deeds, and dated several days back ; so that in her ignorance of the delays in such matters, she considered the sacrifice accomplished.

She had thus prolonged her walk under the fixed determination that it should be a last farewell, and the scene itself might, to a poetic fancy, have seemed to feel it so. The autumn flowers were dropping their leaves and hanging their heads under the first inflictions of winter ; and the trees, except some stately cedars, were worse than naked, having only a few fluttering remains of foliage, like the last hopes of those who planted them. Farther away, the bright river which wound through the park was scarcely distinguished from the objects on its banks, and lost in the rising mist.

“ Even so,” thought Lady Goldfield, “ is another current in which we have perhaps prided too much ? ”

It was not the train of musing to collect consolation for her son, or to encourage the prospect she had entertained for the two unprotected girls who had no other dependence ; and yet it was indispensable to maintain her fortitude for the exigencies of the next day.

But to this endeavour there were still to be trying interruptions, which began with the quick light step of Mary Lightfoot ; who, having performed her commission for Lord Goldfield’s servant, had gone hastily in search of Lady Goldfield, in order that no alarm

might reach her. She had, however, been too much alarmed herself to disguise her agitation, and was the first to bring what she came to guard against; for the first words that met her were to question what was the matter.

“Nothing, Lady Goldfield, nothing. I was only wondering what kept you out so late, and have run myself out of breath.”

“There is something more than that. Something has terrified you! My son—?”

“He is quite well—quite. Only a little uneasy, like myself. I have sent his servant to him.”

“Has he been alone?”

“No; Mr. Philpot has returned, and went up to him some time ago.”

“Then why did they want the servant?”

“I don’t know. I hear the lodge bell. Perhaps it is Mr. Crowley come back. Let me run and bring him here.” And scarce knowing what she did, she was out of sight in a moment. Lady Goldfield clasped her hands, and was rushing to the house when she happily encountered Lord Goldfield and Tom.

“Henry! God help us! What does this mean? What have you been doing?”

“Nothing, dear mother, as God has willed it!”

“Henry! What mean you?”

“Only,” said Tom, in haste to take up the reply. “That Mr. Pinhorn has been here, and his Lordship has turned him out of the house. That is all.”

“Not quite,” added Lord Goldfield, still much dis-

ordered, though he took the hint not to be too communicative. “I have learnt of late, mother, that you have held daily correspondence with that lawyer from London ; and, taking it in connection with some unusual expressions of a wish to leave this place, the truth has flashed upon me that you are about to make yourself homeless to maintain the credit of a son who can no longer be a pride to you. It was hard to resist the chance that might disprove it. You will discover that your last letter is missing ; let no one answer for it but the miserable fool who has so much more to answer. In that letter I have found a receipt for the title deeds of Goldsworthy. Upbraid me not, dear mother ; for I come to tell you there are still hopes of saving it. This Moses Pinhorn has denied in presence of us both that he has any claim upon me, as Cox has done before, and undertaken to prove to-morrow that I owe nothing to any one.”

Lady Goldfield looked at her son as if she doubted his reason, and from him to Tom who, to her surprise, confirmed what he had said.

“That you owe nothing, Henry ! Then whence came the large amount you have received, and whither is to go the much larger one for which you have given your bond ? Trust nothing to this mutual disavowal, though perhaps it might prove fraud in both of them. No strain of the law can exempt one of our house from doing that which he has promised—our law is our word, and we keep it,

at whatever cost. Think not to save Goldsworthy, for it is gone already."

"Gone, mother?"

"Even so, Henry. We have had our choice to part with either that or the honour of our family, and there could be no question. Do not force me to find courage for you, and prove other sons more forward to support a mother, but think how often, in times of other trouble, your fathers have lost their lands to preserve what they held dearer, and whether it is not a prouder boast to redeem than to inherit—we have our work as they had, and must we prove weaker because it is more light?"

The calm self-possession of Lady Goldfield acted rather as an aggravation of her son's troubles than a help to bear them, and Tom, seeing that he had no word to say and appeared to be almost returning to the state in which he had held a pistol to his head, came again to his aid by observing that the work to be done did not seem to be quite of the passive nature which Lady Goldfield contemplated.

"The declaration of Mr. Pinhorn," he said, "was not made under the influence of fear, for his apprehensions had passed away and given place to a feeling of vengeance against Cox for having implicated him in a fraud in which he had no benefit. He is likewise too keen in his craft to talk without a meaning, and the first thing to be done is to discover what that meaning is. It may be that the money lent to Lord Goldfield has been supplied from sources not their own and by pillage of some victim

less rapacious ; some one, most probably, who knew nothing of their doings."

It was a reasonable suggestion, and created a new feature in the dreary aspect of affairs. Lady Goldfield listened earnestly, and the more so from her anxiety to comfort her son by any fair respite, however temporary, from an event for which he was so ill prepared.

"Henry," she said, in a tone of sudden hopefulness, "do you hear this ? It has a look of common sense that shames our want of it. If neither of these persons can venture a demand upon you and no one else comes forward, here must of course have been some robbery in which, by allowing you the advantage, they would make you an accomplice. This unconscious creditor must be found, and till then the proceedings which distress you too much may be arrested, if not too late."

"God bless you, mother, and grant there may be time ! Tom, you were inspired ! You said here was matter for consultation. We must away to Lympton, to Crowley, and the lawyers."

But here were more interruptions. The night which above all others should have been a night of repose, afforded small promise of it. Tom had started up in the act of listening, and again the quick step of Mary Lightfoot was heard advancing more quickly than before. They hurried forward to meet her and again demand what was the matter. She could scarcely speak, but made them understand that she had found a policeman at the lodge

making hasty inquiries if Mr. Crowley was in the house—Aaron Daunt had been seen near Oakendell and had been traced in the direction of Goldsworthy.

“Thank God,” exclaimed all, “he stops at Lymp-ton for the night!”

“Grant Heaven it may be so!” replied Polly. “But listen to those horses at the door. It is the policeman who has brought in Mr. Crowley’s, found without a rider and loose in the forest.”

With the speed of terror they were instantly on the spot, where the constable had dismounted and was ringing loudly for the servants. He repeated what Polly had said, and described the place where the man, supposed dead, had appeared, inquiring of a woodman where Crowley might be found. Lord Goldfield and Tom, who knew the forest blindfold, asked no further question but sprang upon the horses and galloped away in the darkness. All the men-servants of the house followed under the guidance of the constable; and Lady Goldfield and the exhausted Polly ran wringing their hands to the bed-side of Lucy to guard her sleep through the fearful hours of suspense.

To understand the cause of it we must return to Lymp-ton, where Crowley had been waiting since his appearance before the grand jury in the quarters bespoken for Mr. Badger, which chanced to be in the same inn where Moses likewise had his lodging. When, therefore, the latter had concluded his visit to Cox he came back to order a conveyance to Golds-

worthy ; and Crowley heard the waiter calling for it to others below stairs—a carriage to Goldsworthy ! Who could be going there ? He looked out of his door to inquire, and found it was for Mr. Pinhorn. What could he want there ? Something, most likely, in continuation of the proposal that had been made by Cox to Lord Goldfield ; whereupon he immediately went down for his horse to make one of the party. But not wishing to be an interruption to the scheme, whatever it was, before it was declared, he suffered Moses to commence the journey some minutes in advance. He therefore rode only fast enough to keep him in sight, and when they entered the forest turned leisurely into a bridle path which shortened the distance. Here it was in some places dark though light in others, and especially dark when he reached a rustic gate into the thick plantations of Goldsworthy. He was dismounting to find the fastening when it opened before him, and, looking to see who had done him the good office, he leaped from his horse, and in the same action found himself grappling with the real earthly substance of Aaron Daunt. The horse, startled by the sudden movement, galloped away, and the two were left as it seemed to try once more the event of a deadly struggle.

But to Crowley's amazement, Aaron stood perfectly passive and respectful.

" I am not the man I was, sir," he said, " either in sinew or disposition. You need little trouble to

do what you will with me. Be pleased to look at me."

Crowley relaxed his grasp, for the once powerful man was wasted and broken down, with one hand in a sling, and the other supporting him on a stick.

"Aaron, how come you here; and for what purpose have you waylaid me?"

"To make such atonement as I can, sir. I have looked for you at Oakendell, and been told hereabouts, that this was the road you took this morning."

"And what is your business with me *this* time?"

"Not that of the last time, Mr. Crowley. It was then, I could believe, the business of some power beyond me to show by a poor instrument, how far hard usage may divert our nature from good to evil, and at what cost our superiors may oppress those beneath them. That I was born with more pride and feeling than they may think becoming to one in my station, can scarcely be my fault, for they are qualities which, like the elements, are good to use, if dangerous to abuse. You know my history, and can judge of my excuse in a ten years' journey down to the brink of assassination. I have to thank you for a halting-place, and am here to do you service."

"I have been told that you began it on the night of that attempt. If so, I forget and forgive it."

"It is like you, sir, and helps me to be like myself."

"Have you seen none of the bills posted about the country, offering you free pardon for your evidence against Cheek?"

"I have been to a distance, sir, and never heard of them. I was resolved to appear at all risks, but feared to be taken beforehand, which would have damaged the effect of what I had to say, as prompted by fear instead of conscience."

"Trust that to me. I am sorry for the state in which I see you, though glad, as I am surprised, to see you living. What found you in that fire, from which you escaped so strangely?"

"I found," he replied, with a glance at his maimed limbs, "some leisure to follow out the difficult course of your ventures for to-morrow; to puzzle out the forms of a court—in which I have had some experience—and turn two or three crooked lanes into a straight road. Your lawyers cannot do without my help. You have Captain Cox and Mr. Cheek to convict; the fortunes of Miss Longland to recover: the reputation of Sir Harry to place beyond doubt; the murder of my former master to account for, and some uncertain prospects of your own to secure. Besides, as I have read in a roadside newspaper, the prospects of some others."

"If you can bring about all this, Aaron, I shall thank you for that shot. You speak like one convinced!"

"I am, sir, of much of it, and have hopes for the rest. I wish to be brought in communication with your counsel in time for him to study his arrangements, and to keep myself out of sight till he finds occasion for me. That may not be if we remain here longer, for I have been seen to-day, and the forest is alive with those who hunt for me."

"Come back with me to Lympton, for the sun has gone down ; and, in my company you will not be suspected. But, listen ! It is some miles, and you are not in a state to walk. I thought I heard a carriage, which may perhaps take us up. We shall have one presently, for I expect a person whom you may have known,—Moses Pinhorn, the Jew money-lender."

"I know him for the greatest rogue of his tribe. He was so formerly, and is not likely to have mended his ways, which subjected him to such a world of fearful consequences that not a moment of his life has passed without dread of detection ; one while for his own work, and another for his dealings in partnership. Some of these I know to have been with the prisoners now for trial, and he is coming in happy time. Beg a place with him, sir, and waken up his fears for what may befall himself. The more they need his help, the less he will dare to give it, or shrink from any means that may save him."

As he spoke, they came to the public road, where they again made a stand to listen, and scarcely spoke for the next half-hour from fear of being

overheard in the still night, which gradually became very dark. At last they distinguished the rapid hoofs of horses. The quick and practised ears of both of them perceived there were two, and of a different kind, for one came with the pounding of a cross breed, and the other with the long stride of a well-bred hunter.

"I know no horse like that," said Crowley, "except my own."

And they remained in the road till the riders came up, when Crowley called to them to stop.

"Who's there?" cried a voice, which was unmistakably Tom Philpot's.

"Tom!" replied Crowley. "Surely Tom Philpot!"

"By the Lord, and all thanks to him," returned Tom, "it is Mr. Crowley!"

"Right, Tom; and welcome back from your travels. Who is that upon my horse?"

"Harry Goldfield," was the answer, as both jumped off. "What has happened to you?"

"You shall hear by-and-bye. How came you here?"

The story of their fright and the re-appearance of Aaron with the news of Moses and his assertions, was told in very few words. They said they had passed him a mile back, and could now hear him coming.

"Then mount again, both of you, and ride for Lympton, where we shall presently have business in the room engaged for Mr. Badger. Send somebody

off to Lady Goldfield to say that we are all safe, but cannot return to-night. Here is Moses, and I want him all to myself! Off with you, quick"—and they resumed their gallop.

"You have a good hint to go upon, sir," said Aaron, stepping up from the background where he had not been seen. "Lord Goldfield's account may be made to frighten him into an honest man."

The carriage came up, and Crowley, at the risk of passing for a foot-pad, summoned it to stand. Moses looked out in great terror to ask what he wanted.

"Only to warn you, sir, that two desperate characters on two stolen horses are just a-head of you, and you had better have your pistols ready."

"Pistols! I have no pistols, and could not use them if I had."

"Indeed, sir! and the road farther on is a great deal more lonely!"

"Highwaymen! I knew they were highwaymen, nobody else could ride so fast in the dark; and they shouted as they passed us to know whether we had met the police!"

"They thought they were pursued. Really, sir, you have had a narrow escape! If you are going our way, we shall be happy to protect you as far as Lympton."

"Get in, gentlemen, get in! Here's room for one inside and another on the box."

Crowley took his place by Mr. Pinhorn, whilst Aaron mounted by the driver, and the journey was continued.

The fellow-travellers never having met before there was no suspicion of design. As they trotted on, the calmness of one somewhat re-assured the other, and their conversation became more composed about dark nights and dangerous roads, and the many desperate characters that infested the forest during the assize time. It naturally led to the communication that Crowley and his friend were going to see the great trials the next day, and the conclusion that the gentleman they were escorting was going there likewise.

Mr. Pinhorn was going there in a legal capacity, and would have a great deal to do with them.

“Indeed, sir, then perhaps you can tell me whether there is any truth in the strange reports about the country that some very unlooked-for evidence will be given respecting the long absent Sir Harry Longland ?”

Mr. Pinhorn turned his head rather quickly. He had not heard any reports of that kind.

“Really ! I wonder at that, for they are the chief cause of the grand gathering for to-morrow—expectation is raised to the highest pitch, that certain persons, hitherto esteemed highly respectable, will be proved guilty of very villainous dealings; especially those connected with the fellow they call Captain Cox.”

Moses now faced about. “Is that reported ? Is it sure ?”

“No doubt of the reports. It is said that Cox and some confederate have lent a great deal of some-

body else's money on usury to a young lord in this county, and that the lawyers have discovered all about it—they mean, it is said, to prove it on Cox's trial. The racing folks are betting two to one that some of them will be hanged."

Moses sat more uneasily ; crossed and recrossed his legs, and could not please himself. "I never heard a word of it," he replied. "These tidings must be very recent ?"

"Very, for I only heard them to-day."

"And on credible authority ?"

"Oh, quite. It was the conversation of some racing men, who were Cox's greatest friends."

"Do you remember precisely what they said ?"

"They said they had found him out for a great villain, and that he means to betray all who have had anything to do with him in the hope of saving himself."

"Even so ! And what grounds had they for believing it ?"

"Very good ones, I should say, for they know him never to have had a friend in his life whom he did not sell as soon as he could turn him to profit ; and the present being his greatest necessity will, it is supposed, produce the greatest sale."

"But," said Mr. Pinhorn, changing his legs again, "they do not consider that he may at the same time be selling himself—Captain Cox has wits enough to see that."

"So it was argued, but he is known to have only wits to cheat others, none for the control of a rest-

less tongue, which, in any case of peril, does its best to run away with him. Give his jailer half a crown and you will learn as many secrets as you could screw out with the rack."

Every trial of Mr. Pinhorn's confidence increased his ruminations of how to deal with the turn which events might take, and so skilful was the use of Lord Goldfield's brief intelligence, that before the ride was over a much greater alteration was made in the plans for Captain Cox than either party had intended.

As they approached the town, and left behind them the more imminent danger of robbery and murder, Crowley received polite thanks for the protection he had afforded, and not less for his very interesting conversation, and took his leave with Aaron, by back passages to the inn. Moses directed his driver to the prison.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was not too late for re-admission to Cox, who was almost out of his mind from the long trial of his patience.

“What have you done?” he cried. “Why do you shake your death’s head? Has the girl refused?”

“I did not see the damsel.”

“But you saw the other—What did *she* say?”

“She showed me the way to my Lord Goldfield.”

“And what did my Lord Goldfield do?”

“He gave me my choice to go back again, out of the window or over the banisters—and truly I could expect no better, seeing that whilst I laboured for your good, you laid upon me the reproach of all these loans and usuries.”

“It is a lie—I did no such thing!”

“But he showed me your own letter.”

“Curse on you, Jew! How dared you read my letters?”

“Such is ever the Christian payment for the Jew’s service! Perhaps it will please you better if I take it where it will be more welcome. I am

summoned to lift up my voice for the prosecution."

"And if you do perhaps I shall lift up your heels to pummel the way that is paved with good intentions. Why should I not? What have you brought me for the half of my substance?"

"I have brought you security for the other half, if you will heed good counsel."

"What counsel, then? Speak out, for I cannot answer for myself."

"You must not face these many witnesses."

"Don't you say they are coming?"

"But you need not go to meet them."

"What must I fear? Aaron and Bunckle are dead."

"Bunckle was examined before the grand jury this day; and there is a true bill, and another for the felony of the letters."

"The letters! Is Aaron here?"

"It signifies not; for there is the maid, Betsy."

"Betsy will be as true as steel."

"You must not trust her. She has given fearful evidence, and produced a letter from you which promises a great price for a false oath, and is your own evidence against yourself."

"Is Betsy false? No matter—what signify the blunders of a man in my extremity? Have they not driven me to it, and can they make me answer for their own work? Let them do their worst! Is not the town full of my friends, all here to prove a conspiracy? Will they not swear, double strong, to

establish the honour and honesty of a character upon which their own depends ? Have I not made every one of their fortunes, and could I not place one and all of them in a worse predicament than my own ?”

“They do not fear it. They say you have cast off all of them in their turn as soon as they could be of no farther service, and that the turn is now your own. Be prepared for every weight they can add to those which are sinking you. If they were truly friends, what would their value be ? The word of one honest witness would scatter a Pandemonium of them, and you have more than one against you. What say you to the high-born maid of Broome Warren, for whose truth, report says, the jury themselves would be security ?”

“What do I say ? Why, I say that all they call truth is the devil’s varnish for duplicity.”

“That might be well, were you the only judge. But others say she was the gift of Providence to an aged and dying kinsman, and that even whilst it was blessing the performance of her sacred duties you dared an outrage for which all human pardon would be a sin.”

“Beware, old hypocrite. You are not safe.”

“I have no fears—your jailer guards the door. If you love not the mention of that maiden, what say you to the lofty lady of Goldsworthy who turned you from her doors for threats of other wrong which brings another charge against you as fatal as the two which would be enough without.

it ? What say you to the noble youth who was too honest himself to suspect ruin from a friend ? What to the character of him who thought you worthy of this prison ? What to the good woman who witnessed your preparations, and so bravely risked her life to defeat them ? And what to the king's officer who bore you off in chains and listened for days to your unguarded ravings ? Think of all this, and whether there be hope in Israel ; and then reflect what more there is to crush you. Your charge against *me* compelled me to deny it, and refutes all claim for *yourself*. Then whose monies have you been dealing with ? The court will say you have done some great robbery on some person unknown, and, in the end, you will be tried for your life, with *me* as your worst accuser. You must not meet these witnesses to-morrow ; you must bespeak indulgence from the court—you must plead guilty to the charge on which you are first arraigned, and the others may pass by—you must plead guilty—a short imprisonment is better than consequences so uncertain.”

The Captain, who writhed terribly under these undeniable truths, was cowed and crestfallen notwithstanding his bravado.

“Are you sure there will be nothing but a short imprisonment ?”

“I am sure.”

“Then guilty be it ; but mind you this : you have thought me more a man of sport than business, but dispossess yourself of that idea, and remember that

we sink or swim together. My accuser you dare not be. You know that a word from either would bring the same penalty on both. How, but for that, can you account for my easy consent to your terms ? If I get more than a short imprisonment look to yourself. Had you treated me fairly, what need should I have had to carry off this girl ?”

“ Had you not made that attempt there had been no grounds for hunting out a motive.”

“ Say, rather, there had been none had you not furnished them with your communications at Goldsworthy.”

“ I should not have made them had you not wronged me and done that which placed me in great jeopardy. I am now in as great straits to repair the consequences.”

“ Which may be a place like this for yourself, and another field of less profitable partnership.”

“ I need never have mentioned this bond to you.”

“ Which you only did because you could make nothing of it without me.”

“ It is bad policy to bandy words like this, and be our own accusers when there are no other.”

“ I give you credit for your policy, Moses. To whom but you am I indebted for storms at sea and stone walls on land ? The execrations of which you make so much, the desertion of high connections, destruction of unbounded prospects, a shameful exhibition in the felon’s dock, where thousands of old acquaintance will come to mock at me, and a wind-

up which neither you nor I can foresee ;—all this do I owe to you, Moses, with the addition of half I possess in requital. It is to be sure of your half that you recommend me to plead guilty. I tell you again, look to it !”

“ You have no reason in what you say, and it is no good to answer. It is locking up time, and I shall not get out.”

“ A blessing for your clients if you never could. But stop a moment. Give me better news of Cheek than you do of myself. What’s to become of him ? What’s all that howling that I hear through the wall ?”

“ He’s in a very bad way, if that will please you. He has broken down terribly as the time comes on.”

“ And taken to psalm-singing and beating time with his head against the granite. It is what I promised him, and not far from what he promised me, though both of us have been obliged to others for its fulfilment. I did not think, Moses, that such promises came back to us with so much usury, for the greatest grief I feel is that my own part in this compact is not my own performance, though it is some comfort that he may feel the same.”

“ Look you there again at your own policy ! Was it not your quarrel with Cheek that roused this Badger on our tracks, and caused my summons as a witness on this trial, and subjects me to I know not what examinations.”

“ No fear, my Moses, you can swear your way

through them. 'Twill only help you one stage nearer to the place you are bound for with many a heavier load upon your back. There's one behind that wall who has outstepped you, and can describe the nearer prospect. Go, cheer him with your countenance. Give him ghostly counsel, and show him what he'll come to when he dies. Here Bolt, you brute, unlock the door."

And Mr. Pinhorn having, as he hoped, secured his interests on one side, took a harassed farewell to guard them on another. He knew Cheek to be aware that a bond had once existed, and was reasonably apprehensive that his terrors might take him out of his way to claim consideration for blurting it out.

Mr. Bolt, on the strength of old acquaintance with his worshipful prisoner, thought himself especially called upon to pay his attentions on the eve of the great event, and took his part in the visit.

"Cheek's miserable state had not been exaggerated. He was supporting himself against the wall, shivering and staring at his barred window as if it showed some hideous goblin, and when Bolt saluted him with his usual "Hope I see your worship pretty well," started round with affright, as if there were more goblins behind him.

"I hope you see the bars is all right, sir, according as you directed."

As soon as Cheek assured himself that his company consisted of flesh and blood, he recovered some

remote approach to his senses, and found breath for a few indistinct words of recognition.

“ Why, what’s the matter with your worship now ? Have you been to sleep and had another of those dreams ? ”

“ No,” replied Cheek with a shudder, “ I was quite awake ! ”

“ Bear up, Mr. Cheek,” said Mr. Pinhorn, after regarding him with silent mistrust. “ This will never do before the jury. You will be found guilty before you are tried.”

“ Come, your worship, look after yourself, for drat me if I can tell where it is gone. You used to be a fine blustering gentleman, as always thought justice too merciful ; and now that is all changed, just as you’d have it, what can you want more ? It is no use to be a child again, for them as is never lives to be a man. What do you see in that window ? ”

Cheek was too deep in his fears to be shamed out of them, and they really had reduced him to a child or something less.

“ Tell me,” he almost whispered, “ was that the window that Aaron jumped out of ? ”

“ That ? Not it ! Aaron’s window is two stories higher. He had courage, he had.”

“ Aye, why should I think I saw him there ? He told me he was not drowned.”

“ Have a care, Mr. Cheek,” said Mr. Pinhorn very quickly, “ have a care. He never told you anything, for you have not seen him, you know,

since he was committed from Broome Warren.
That is your defence."

"Of course, of course"—and he seemed to swallow up his words. "I meant—I meant——"

"What did your worship mean?"

"I meant that I had heard it when they said he had been burnt in my barn. He couldn't have told me that, you know; and that's the reason he goes about on fire. Do you think he will be here tomorrow?"

"I hope not, Mr. Cheek, if he goes about on fire?"

"What if he comes, your worship? You that never see any excuse for criminals can, of course, never have been one yourself."

"I! No; nobody can say so, unless, you see, unless they speak false."

"Mr. Cheek"—and Moses shook his head—"you have a dangerous imagination. Why should a dead man come with false evidence instead of the true?"

"But it isn't true. Nothing is true, except——"

"Except what, your worship?"

"Except that I saw him just now."

"Saw Aaron Daunt, Mr. Cheek? That is not possible."

"Your worship can't have seed nobody, for haven't I had the keys? What's there? What are you pointing at?"

"I saw him at that window!"

"Mr. Cheek, Mr. Cheek, you are as mad as Nebuchadnezzar."

"He was only just gone by as you came in."

"Do you say that you distinctly saw Aaron Daunt?"

"Not very distinctly; there was such a blaze, all green and blue, and the straws of the barn were all sticking out of him in shoots of fire."

Mr. Bolt began to enjoy some capital joke.
"What, your worship, just like a rory bory allus?
Dash me if you ha'n't made a devil of the lamp-lighter!
He! ha! ho!
And sure enough when we sees him of a dark night through them bull's-eye windows he do look enough to frighten one,
and no mistake.
Don't you remember, sir, we al'ays 'luminates at 'size time when the judge arrives?"
And again he roared with laughter.

But Mr. Pinhorn was grave and nervous, and shook his head again.

"Mr. Cheek, you must not betray such mistakes,
or the people will think you have some greater cause for fear than we yet know of."

"A joke!" cried Cheek, with a sepulchral imitation of Mr. Bolt's mirth.
"A joke, to prove how little fear I have of anything!"
But though he was wonderfully relieved on the subject of demonology
he was very much scared at the hint he received from Mr. Pinhorn.

"Your worship had better go to bed," observed Mr. Bolt, "and sleep your jokes off, for there'll be no joking to-morrow."

“Yes,” added Moses, “you must be in earnest then. We must not stop to hear any more jokes, for they will examine me against you. We must not talk of business to-night, but leave to-morrow to take care of itself. Sergeant Heaviside says there is no case to go to the jury, and you will pass through your trial as safe as Shadrach in the burning fiery furnace, or Daniel in the den of lions.”

“To be sure—no doubt—but—tell me—can anything be talked of to-morrow but just the subject of the indictment?”

“It is not usual.”

“What then—it is sometimes?”

“Such may have happened; but Sergeant Heaviside will take care of that.”

“Yes, I have no fear. But couldn’t I just see him for a last consultation?”

“We have consulted.”

“Yes, but *I* haven’t. The time is very near, and perhaps I may have something to say.”

“You will do better to say nothing, and think of no new subjects whilst you have others to think for you. Good night, and be confident.”

“No, no; you must not leave me!”

“Why, what is your worship afraid of?”

“Afraid—afraid? of nothing but the dull hours of a winter’s night. At what o’clock to-morrow will this business begin?”

“There’s no saying for certain when your worship’s will begin. They’ve got to do the Captain’s business for him first.”

There was something not quite to Mr. Cheek's taste in this form of words, but he struggled hard to maintain the dignity of a lord of Broome Warren, made piteous efforts to laugh at his joke of the lamplighter, and even commissioned Bolt to order his carriage and four to be ready at the door of the Court House to take him home.

"Yes, sir, in course; and perhaps your worship would like to subscribe to the 'Size ball? It will be very fashionable, for the ladies do like to dance poor criminals out of the world, and send 'em off merrily. Suppose we put your name down for one of the stewards."

But before Cheek's tremulous pomposity could make him more pitiable, a bell announced the hour for shutting up, and Mr. Pinhorn was glad to take leave for other work of that momentous night. He had to examine every cranny of the law through which some skilful sharp-shooter might pick him off, and barricade the breaches through which Cox might find occasion to storm him on one side, and Lord Goldfield on the other. Besides which he had observed enough to harass him more and more at every word from his dangerous client, and desired Bolt to conduct him out.

Cheek, when his visitors turned to depart, broke down as frightfully as ever, but his efforts to detain them were of no avail. The door closed, and the bolts were shot in his face, and he sank once more against the wall. He had not reclined there long when he started and cried out at a remote and

scarcely audible yell of his own name. "Cheek," it said, "Cheek, you have no hope! Cheek, beware of Monday morning! Strike up the Hundredth Psalm! They are writing the condemned sermon! The crows are coming! Do you hear the wind whistling through your bones? Boo hoo—oo—oo!" As it happened, at that moment the wind began to howl with the dreary blast of November. The window rattled, and the old prison wailed a fancied requiem; and the wretched prisoner clawed the air madly in search of the comforters who had just locked him up. So prostrate had his wits become that he never once dissociated the voice of fate from the devilry of Cox, who appeared to think that by increasing the tortures of Cheek he might, to some extent, diminish the horrors of his own.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE spirit that is not lightened by returning day must be sunk far in the earthy depths of misery, and both Cheek and Cox were relieved by the genial phantom chaser, the one by some accession of reason and the other by an equal dispersion of his scarce manly agonies ; they were likewise both supported for their great occasion by the humane care of the Governor and other authorities, whose compassion is seldom wanting to afford the uphill traveller a fair struggle of his natural powers in the last stage to the top, and might be likened to the skilled in surgery who surprise the unpractised by giving the appearance of life where it has passed away. The two prisoners being not so far gone as this, might be said to have been, after the examples of the race course or the ring, trained up to their best efforts for the last moment of trial. What may be the reaction in such cases we have sometimes seen, but whether it was followed out as a rule in the present one we have yet to learn. Both were provided with whatever they pleased to sustain

them, and prepared an hour before the time to receive any friends or others who might help to fortify them. The privilege was not claimed by any one in the upper ranks of society, who had neither curiosity for a private interview nor pity for the probable conclusion of their public one, but of subordinate applicants there were a great many, for it had gone abroad amongst them that the respective sentences were sure to be capital ; and one agricultural heart was mollified to a "dang it, I wish no harm to those who are past doing any, and shouldn't mind saying good-bye ;" and another carried natural feeling a little farther, and was reluctant that any man should carry off a load of wrong doings which might be lightened by a word of forgiveness, and which cost "nobody nothing."

Amongst these latter ones, the governor had given permission, if the prisoner pleased, to three decent women, an old one and two young ones, to pay a short visit to Cheek, and Mr. Bolt announced Mrs. Rokins and her daughter, and a poor girl from no one knew where, who said she had been Cheek's servant.

"Hallo ! mother Rokins !" was the greeting of Cheek, who being a great man had feelings of quite another order ; "what brings you here ?"

"Why, please your worship, we didn't part, the last time I seed you, quite as friendly as we humble folks like to do, and I'm come to say I've quite forgot it, and hope you've done the same. For now as trouble has come upon you we didn't ought to

think of such things ; and I'm sure if I said or did anything amiss, I ax your Honour's pardon."

" Anything amiss ! Why, ain't it your doing that I am now in prison and going to be tried ? Wasn't it you that sent for your Mr. Crowley when I made a kindly call for my rent, which you refused to pay, and obliged me to use him as he deserved ? was it not this which made the devil knows who turn me out of the commission ; and do you suppose if I had stayed there I should have helped to commit myself here ?"

" Oh ! please, your worship, don't say things as is not true just now ! It wasn't you as treated Mr. Crowley as he deserved, but quite t'otherwise, and you had no call to do as you have done since, which I didn't come to talk about, because you'll have enough talking about it without me. I only come with my Sukey to part kindly and hope you'll think nothing more of what them lawyers wrote about, for I considered you might be glad to hear we are getting on well with the help of Mr. Crowley's washing, and don't want for nothing."

" And I'm sure, your worship," said pretty penitential Susan, " I'm very sorry for that smack I gave you, and hope you've forgot all about it, for I shall never give you another, and I'm very much obliged to you for the skim milk, which is all the same, though I didn't come for it."

" Don't think, mother Rokins, that all this cant will make you housekeeper or laundress at The Chase, for I'm not the sort of person to forget how

you behaved, and you too, you Sukey. It's too late to come for the skim milk now, for men of my station must make examples of those who don't know how to conduct themselves. It's all of no use, and so you had better be off before I give you in charge to the turnkey."

Mrs. Rokins was a proud dame, for her sphere, and if he had not, as she fully believed, been sure to be hanged on Monday, there would have been seen something like the battle of the wash tub; but whatever would have been resented from a person standing on his legs had an easy claim to her better feelings when she saw him reversed.

"Ah, Mr. Cheek," she gently said, "I ain't a going to answer. We came to do our best, but may be our best is to go away and pray that when we meet again things may be altered."

"Good-bye, Mr. Cheek," added Sukey; "I hope wherever you go you may find things to your satisfaction."

Cheek, we have long seen, was a character that admitted very different descriptions—a giant from one end of the telescope and a dwarf from the other—an ogre in the concave of the spoon, and on the convex a chap-fallen skeleton drawn out upon the rack, and the spoon changed sides as fast as eyes could follow. He was this morning the giant and the ogre because he misunderstood all visits of humanity to be only so many acknowledgments of his importance, and proofs that he could be in no peril; he had therefore no desire for sympathy, and

no thanks for pardon, and was commanding from his presence the good hearts that brought him both, when the silent girl who had given them precedence stood opposed to him and asked if he had forgotten Nelly.

“Nelly! is it *you*? Where got you these fine clothes? Not by gathering chestnuts and blackberries in the forest, I’ll warrant, and not by the well-ordered life you led at Green Lane’s End, before you ran away to be your own mistress—a pretty mistress you must have been to yourself, and a pretty face you must have to face it out.”

“I understand your evil thoughts, Mr. Cheek,” replied Nelly, who ever since her father had given himself up to the police had attended upon her friends at Goldsworthy, to which she owed her improved manners and appearance. “I understand, and wish you had no such thoughts, no memory for your meaning of new gowns except that you never dared to confess it—I came in the hope of finding you changed as the ragged girl who left your house because she saw too much to witness more—I had taken your shelter and had no mind to betray it—I tried to save you from betraying yourself, and if I took my warning to those who might prevent the evils you intended, it was not to make them fall upon yourself. I thank the mercy that frightened me away before they came. I returned now to part from you in peace, and to hope that nothing which has passed from my mind and might give pain to yours may add a grain to your present thoughts which may be heavier than I

wish to know. I've but to say good-bye.—Whatever happens here may be no hindrance to things that are better, and if poor Nelly's prayers can assist you, they shall not be wanting—Good-bye again, good-bye."

Cheek could afford no return for good wishes which implied his need of them, and though he would have thought the three forgiving souls three merciless fates, if he had ever heard of such folks, his relief at finding himself no longer alone at midnight was enough to maintain the importance which he felt becoming to a great squire. Nelly and her companions turned from him with no more words and no expression but pity at his shout to Mr. Bolt to order his coach and four and attendants to take him to the court.

"Your worship," replied Bolt, as they passed out, "didn't direct me to have it here till after you was acquitted; and as we don't know when that will be, I thought it might be time enough to send for it when it's wanted. The van will be here when the Captain is done for, and you'll have it all to yourself, except half a dozen police to take care of you; so you needn't be in a hurry. M'ap it may amuse you if I borrow the sermon what the chaplain is a-going to preach on Sunday."

Captain Cox also had his visitors who forgot their grievances to cheer him with the last intelligence of how the bets ran, and satisfy their curiosity as to the "condition in which he would come to the post." But as we have seen enough of him to form a toler-

able guess, we leave them to congratulate him on the grand figure he was about to make and the celebrity conferred by all the newspapers in the kingdom. The obliquitous taste of sporting gentlemen who would rather be notorious in any way than live in unenvied obscurity, may be less interesting to our reader than the bedside of a sufferer who only does not die because it is her duty to live.

We need not repeat with what intense watchfulness Lucy Longland had been nursed up to this last hour, beyond which fate could offer nothing for better or for worse, or that singular courage which seemed to sustain itself by feeding on the fair form it inhabited. She had passed the night in that calmness which is the sure reward of those who repose their trust in Providence, only showing the occupation of her sleeping thoughts by a low and thankful murmur of “Father” and “To-morrow.”

In the grey of the morning, Mary Lightfoot, who had always slept in the same room, was standing ready dressed on one side of her bed and Lady Goldfield on the other, but did not awaken her till the last moment they could afford.

She rose with some appearance of suppressed agitation, but soon subdued it to preserve the energies so nearly called for. For the same reason she spoke but little; for the love she felt for those who helped her simple toilet was better spoken by her eyes. She was soon ready to descend with them to their early breakfast; and, at eight o’clock, the carriage was ready to convey them to Lympton.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE morning was bright and frosty; every rag within the radius of Cheek's celebrity was fluttering to the scene of the great holiday, and Broome Warren whistled its way to jail as gaily as it had sometimes whistled back. Lympton was blocked up by wheels of all descriptions; waggon loads of farmers and their families; county equipages; squires' dog-carts; rural costermongers; horses, donkeys, and all grades of humanity, kicking, beseeching, clamouring, and only preserving their equilibrium by a crush on all sides at once. Let any one who has witnessed both pastimes pronounce which is the liveliest—a fair day, when all the world goes out of its mind for penny trumpets, or a county assize, when old acquaintance are preparing their last dying speech.

The space before the court-house—which lay a little off the street—had been fenced off by railings, which hundreds were jumping over, whilst a strong staff of police were inviting other hundreds to jump back again. But, when the

Goldsworthy carriage was distinguished, a more combined exertion cleared the way to a private entrance, and here the most important officers of the county were in waiting to receive Lady Goldfield.

The party were speedily led out of sight to their places on the bench, where Lady Goldfield and Mary Lightfoot seated Lucy between them, with the lord lieutenant and the sheriff close at hand. The judge's chair and desk were in the centre, and in front was a partially drawn red curtain, which afforded a view of the court.

The sight, independent of other considerations, would, to eyes which had never looked upon a larger assemblage than the very limited congregation of Broome Warren church, have been appalling from its multitude. The galleries were crowded with all the leading families within a day's journey, and the body of the court was packed with scarce room for another head. The triple row of forms by the long table beneath the bench, were filled with more law than had ever been seen there, and the only places unoccupied were the jury box, the dock, and the small elevation for the witnesses.

Crowley and Lord Goldfield and Tom Philpot were seen conversing with Mr. Badger and the counsel, a calm, gentlemanly man, who was no doubt Mr. Lincoln, the lawyer who had been honoured by the commendations of Mr. Bolt. His manner was watched most intently, for every one was aware of his heavy responsibilities, but it

showed no discomposure, for he spoke leisurely, and was once or twice observed to smile. Crowley himself betrayed no symptoms of misgiving, but rather a recovery of the confidence which had been so much damaged. Mr. Badger, meanwhile, was not to be scrutinised, for his head was bent over a sheet of foolscap, writing, as it seemed, some supplement to Lincoln's brief, of materials newly come to hand —a supposition borne out by Lord Goldfield and Tom, who were whispering in both his ears.

They had not long been so engaged when the clock struck nine, and the two lawyers turned to their respective stations. Presently a flourish of trumpets was heard, and understood to be a signal to clear the way for the judge; and in a few more minutes a private door opened, and a tall, dignified personage in scarlet and ermine stood forward to receive the homage of the bar. He was of a grave age and sedate demeanour, and his marked features and piercing eye were calculated to impress many people with a belief that justice looked best in her bandage. As soon as he had taken his seat, and the court became silent, he exchanged a few words with a black gown beneath him; and then a solemn call was made for the first case, which was that of Samuel Cox. The once self-satisfied captain was immediately ushered in between two jailors, and placed in the dock, where he shrank before a volley of eyes which many a malefactor would have gladly exchanged for a shower of bullets.

To those who had only seen him in his days of

presumption he would scarcely have been known, though he had recovered the flash costume he had worn on his visit to Goldsworthy, and left at Sea Cliff, to make his best impression ; sea fare and prison mishaps had caused it to fit him without a strain, and his contour, which had been round and exulting in the field of fortune, was lank and disheartened, as if he had, at last, made a very bad book.

“Samuel Cox,” demanded the official, usually answered with a falsehood that has legal absolution ; “how say you ? Are you guilty or not guilty ?”

To the extreme surprise of every one present, and the unspeakable relief of Lucy and her friends, he was *this* time answered with the truth, for Cox, with a voice and manner most inoffensive and deprecating, first petitioned that his great devotion to the prosecutrix, and his strong desire to replace her in the affluent circumstances once enjoyed by her family, might plead in extenuation, and then very penitently acknowledged that he *was* guilty.

A burly old gentleman, with a broad, red face, instantly bounced up to object that this plea was in direct opposition to his counsel, for he had entertained no doubt of an acquittal. He disclaimed it *in toto*, and denounced it as badly advised, if not for some sinister purpose. He insisted that the needless fears of his client had been tampered with ; that he was too confused to see he was taking the part of the prosecution, and passing

sentence on himself; and that a plea so unaccountable should be reversed.

"My lord," said the captain, lost between his two advisers, "may I beg permission to confer with my solicitor?"

"Let him come forward," replied the judge; and a messenger went out to bring him.

"My lord," said Lincoln, "Mr. Pinhorn was subcpoenaed as a witness in the case, though he subsequently accepted the office of solicitor for the defence, and has been removed from the court amongst the other witnesses. Perhaps your lordship may think there is something anomalous in the union of two such opposite duties, which Mr. Pinhorn may be required to explain, and likewise the reason why the prisoner must have another person to tell him whether he is guilty or innocent."

"No—no—no!" cried Moses, entering at the last word, and running to the dock. "Are you insane?" he hissed in Cox's ear. "You must not say you are innocent! You will ruin everything! You must keep to guilty, or you will bring down the Goldfields, who is waiting to heap a great bad character on your head, and open the whole history of the accommodations and the bonds, and you will be hanged! Hold your peace and keep to guilty, and you will only have the short imprisonment."

"Prisoner," resumed the judge, "you must make up your mind, for we cannot be delayed by con-

sultations which ought to have been concluded before you came into court."

Moses took these words as a hint to disappear, though he knew it was not their intention, and shuffled back to the place from whence he had come, whilst Cox, seeing he should gain nothing by hesitation, again admitted himself to be guilty.

The judge straightway prepared to pronounce sentence, when Sergeant Heaviside bounced up again.

"My lord," he cried, "I beg to submit that the usual course is to postpone sentence in such cases to the last day of the session, in order to give the prisoner the advantage of such evidence as may be brought forward on the important point of character. I understand he has a very extended connection amongst persons of the highest station, many of whom will, without doubt, be in attendance."

"We cannot lose time for them; but if they are here, let them come forward."

"The Earl of Goldfield is here," observed Lincoln, with a slightly satirical look, "and has known the prisoner intimately enough to say more about him than anybody else can."

"Then let Lord Goldfield be called."

"No, my lord, no," interposed the Captain; "I had rather not. I do not wish to be under obligations."

"Then, brother Heaviside, I see no occasion for delay."

"Samuel Cox," he proceeded, turning to the dock

with an ominously deep voice, "you have pleaded guilty to three great offences,—one of attempted housebreaking, another of subornation of robbery, and the third, and much the worst, of plotting and —but for providential protection—effecting the atrocious crime of abduction. To either of these offences the law awards a heavy sentence, and taking them together, you can scarcely expect a light one."

The Captain pricked up his ears.

"The course you have taken in sparing the time of the Court is, perhaps, the wisest; for though it can in no degree affect the sentence, it shortens the duration of your exposure where you now stand. All efforts to impress an offender so desperate with any compunctions of conscience or regard for that character to which I see you pretend, would be hopeless and wasted. The only useful advice is punishment."

"My lord, I withdraw my plea."

"It is too late. I cannot allow a step, taken after such long deliberation, to be reversed in the moment you find justice treading on your heels. You will leave this country for a term of ten years. Take him away."

"Ten years!" shrieked the Captain, almost springing out of the dock, and struggling with his jailors for another word. "Ten years! I shall never come back! I am transported for life! Moses! Mcses Pinhorn, stand out and confess it was you, not I, that pleaded guilty! Get me a

fair trial, and remember, I told you to beware ! Stop him before he runs away ! Search his lodgings ! He has brought down a deed for hundreds of thousands to sell to me and go halves ! Stop him ! Stop him !”

The judge made a sign, and the Captain and his noise were soon out of sight and hearing. At the same instant Lincoln rose to state that the suspicions of the prosecution ran very much in a line with the convict Cox’s assertions, and to beg that proper officers might be sent on the search directed.

“Search for whatever may be needful to the ends of justice,” replied the judge; and two or three officers of the Court, with our active old friend Badger at their head, were speedily on their way to obey him.

The short work that had been made of the first event of the day was a sad disappointment to the lovers of sensation, who had looked forward to the thrilling tale of Lucy, the daring attack of Cox and his ruffians, and the valorous defence of Crowley; but they were about to have ample amends in the second, which was introduced by a still more impressive call for Christopher Cheek.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ambition of Mr. Cheek to be the most conspicuous man in the county was immediately accomplished, though he did not seem very proud of it. In spite of his furs and gilded chains he looked very ghastly, and his small eyes blinked at the people from his farthest corner as if every one of them were prepared to fly at him. But he was brought to bay, and had no resource but to do battle. So when he was asked the question which had so puzzled Captain Cox, he indignantly answered "Not guilty."

The next business was to empanel a jury, which was not very easy, for several of the persons called were excused, some on the ground that they were not unprejudiced by former dealings with him, and some because they were challenged by himself, for no visible reason except that he had a strong objection to everybody in that capacity. The judge at last finding the number summoned to select from almost exhausted, cut the matter short by ordering

into the box the last twelve on the list, and the trial commenced.

With the particulars of the charge we are too well acquainted to need a repetition of Lincoln's statement of what he meant to prove. He had every talent to make it interesting, though it was generally known before, and carried away his hearers very far from the after endeavours of his bluff opponent to recall them.

The evidence of Crowley, which succeeded, was likewise listened to with extreme attention, and almost with terror, though the peril was past; for he was the last man whom the society of those parts could afford for a dead shot, briefly as he had mixed in it. However the law and the jury might determine, it was clear that all other sympathies were on the right side, and that a failure of conviction would be something more than public disappointment.

Nevertheless, a failure it seemed likely to be from the exhibition of the next witness, whose distended flounce and bustle were squeezed into the box with some difficulty, and as much amusement as the gravity of the case permitted. This personage was, of course, the rainbow-tinted lady of the Vicarage, who appeared to be decorated with a feather from every variety of the poultry show, and to consider herself—as for some golden moments she was—the most important lady present, pluming her radiance with a look of scorn on the leading county families

to show them what they had lost in not coveting her patronage. It was a sore trial of the counsel's patience to keep her tongue to any point in particular, for never before had it found so grand an occasion for the display of its conversational powers. The amazement of all who heard her at the volubility which could neither be followed nor comprehended was mistaken for admiration; and often as she was pulled up and brought back to the post she broke away upon another false start. It was not before she had established very reasonable doubts of anything she might say, that something like a connected tale of her discoveries could be patched together, and then, with the satisfied look of having made a great impression, she was gladly turned over to the courtesies of the learned sergeant, who had a character to retrieve after the mishap of his first client.

Mr. Heaviside had been on the watch, like a jealous house-dog, for every movement of Crowley's, but had shown too much sagacity to snap at an object which kept out of range; but now, if we may so speak, he stepped out of his kennel, creaming all over with a sneer which showed his teeth so pleasantly that Mrs. Bloomer received it quite in the way of gallantry.

"Good morning, madam," he said.

Mrs. Bloomer returned his salutation, and prepared for fresh distinction.

"You are, I believe, the owner of that wonderful

bird so widely celebrated under the title of Jim Crow?"

Mrs. Bloomer acknowledged the proud fact, and entered into his history from the time he was an egg, which Mr. Heaviside pronounced to be extremely edifying.

"It is said that his great value tempted some wicked person to steal him?"

"It is perfectly true; and I have not the least doubt it was the prisoner, who afterwards bribed two other wicked persons to be punished for him."

The sergeant was much shocked. "I should think, ma'am, it must have incensed you very much against him?"

"Oh my, I should think so!"

"Of course. And is very hard to forgive?"

"I never have, and never will forgive him."

The sergeant turned round with a grimace upon the jury, and Lincoln looked as if it would have done him good to wring Jim Crow's neck, and his owner's too.

But Mrs. Bloomer had not done yet, and continued more and more to enjoy her distinction, for which, she had no doubt, she was envied by all around her; and admitted successively, in answer to the polite enquiries, that she had always been determined to be revenged on Mr. Cheek for a great many other things. He had estranged her husband and taught him shocking habits; cheated him of his tithes, written her impertinent letters, and—

when she was peeping through the chink, had absolutely put her in fear of her life. Yes, it was a very windy night, and she was very much confused and frightened, and hardly knew what she was at. It was very difficult to hear anything, but she believed she had some talent for putting odds and ends together, and making out a meaning where other people might be at a loss. No, people could not be blamed for putting the worst constructions when they had received such immense provocations. Yes, she would stick at nothing if she could only transport him. In fine, Sergeant Heavyside bowed, and wished her another polite good morning; upon which she bowed and smiled, and was packing up her flounce to descend, much gratified, when Mr. Lincoln begged the pleasure of another word.

“Pray, madam, do you know what made the learned sergeant so civil?”

Mrs. Bloomer supposed it was natural politeness.

“Oh yes; he is very polite—nobody more so. But had you no suspicion that he was working, like a thief in the dark, to steal away your character?”

“Steal away my character?”

“Yes, ma’am, and he has stolen it. I am sorry to say it is utterly gone. And now, if you please, you may go too.”

“Goodness gracious me!” exclaimed the astonished lady, flinging her eyes at the laughers all about her, and detecting the insidious Mr. Heavyside amongst

the heartiest. “ Well ! did I ever ! Catch me here again !” and down from her elevation and off through the admiring crowd she spurned and scratched her exit.

It was a bad beginning for the prosecution ; and, when the commodore was called, his examiner took special care not to trust the other side with quite so fair a field as the last. He began by forestalling all the dangerous questions that could be asked, and, before he arrived at the barn and subsequent events, made his witness give a detailed account of all his life and adventures. The story had quite enough romance in it to be heard with much attention ; particularly the jump out of the jail window, for which he was thought justified by the brutal amusement of his turnkey ; and by the time he was running into the business of the day, Mr. Bunckle had conjured up a pretty fair breeze.

“ And now,” said Lincoln, “ be good enough to tell the jury whether you are under any particular obligations to Mr. Crowley.”

“ Yes, sir, I am.”

“ Let us know what they are.”

“ I was tempted by a large sum of money to assist in carrying away a young lady as was a great friend of his’n, and he took me in the fact.”

“ Do you consider that an obligation ?”

“ Not exactly that, sir ; but the way he did it was.”

“ And how did he do it ?”

“ Why, sir, he did it as I never seen it done afore.

He saw my poor girl and my little boy a breaking of their hearts, and almost dead with hunger and hardship, and he couldn't stand it—he promised me he'd take care of 'em, and gave me good advice, as if he would have spared me if he could; and if other justices had done the same, I should have been a better man."

The muscles of the commodore's visage, which was not unlike the knot of an old apple-tree, were seen to crinkle up and down with some sensation which he could only restrain by a hoarse cough.

"We are a rough set, sir," he continued, "and ain't used to be talked to in that manner; and justices don't commonly carry home our poor little children in their own arms; and that, I think, *is* an obligation."

"I think so too, Mr. Bunckle, and I respect you for your sense of it. Has Mr. Crowley given you any money for coming here?"

"No, sir, he hasn't; but I've had a plenty from what he gave my children whilst I was in jail."

"Has he promised you anything?"

"Nothing, sir—I've not seen him since the night I warned him of his danger."

"Very good—we will now turn to that night."

The evidence from this point was a simple relation of what we know, but it was given with a readiness and apparent incapacity for invention which afforded a good counterpoise to the heavy loss in Mrs. Bloomer. Lincoln sat down well satisfied, and the

sergeant rose, much less so, to make what he could of the dangerous witness.

" You were aware," he said, " of Aaron Daunt's intention to attempt the life of Mr. Crowley before you came to the barn—why did you not warn Mr. Crowley without that loss of time ?"

" Because, sir, I only suspected—Aaron did not speak positive, but only as if he wanted to find out whether I would do anything to prevent him ; and so I thought I would take a look into the barn to see what he was doing."

" The wind was very loud, I believe ?"

" Quite a roarer, sir."

" Then how did you hear what passed ?"

" Well, sir, I didn't hear half of it ; but I heard all that I have said I did."

" And how came you to meet Mrs. Bloomer there ?"

" Why, I was a feeling my way in the dark, and put my arms round her."

" And was there no previous arrangement ?"

" No. If there had a been, I suppose she wouldn't have kicked up such a squeal. Though I don't deny we got pretty sociable at last."

There was an indication of mirth, which showed that the commodore was not going down in the world, and the sergeant became rather impatient.

" Can you tell me," he said, as a last resource, " anything that may tend to corroborate all this statement ?"

" Why, no, sir; I can't tell you anything that

may, but I can tell you something that might have done so."

"And what is that?"

"Well, sir, I think if your head had been in Mr. Crowley's hat, or got that lick from Mr. Crowley's fist which turned Aaron wrong side uppermost, you'd have had corroboration enough."

As this blunt response raised a demonstration on the wrong side, Mr. Heaviside told him he might go down.

He was followed by the two or three policemen, who gave their evidence creditably, though it seemed much weakened in the eyes of the jury by the mischievous efforts of the sergeant. His manœuvres tended to show that, placing all due faith in them, they had heard no conversation between the prisoner and Aaron which proved the crime to have been attempted on commission. And that nothing was more natural than Aaron's flight from the scene of his great peril to seek shelter and protection from one who had formerly held a good opinion of him, and might perhaps be induced to take his version of the story in preference to any other. If conversations had been overheard which involved the prisoner in suspicion it was to be remembered that lawyers very often received confidences quite as guilty, and were considered bound in honour not to divulge them. The one little circumstance to upset this theory was Cheek's assertion that Aaron had stolen the gun, whereas it was now proved that he had lent it to him, as had

been witnessed by Bunckle. But this fact, of course, slipped Mr. Heaviside's memory, and was only recalled to it in re-examination, when Lincoln gave him good cause to recollect it in future, and again effected some change in the aspect of the jury. But the event of the trial was, at this stage, by no means certain, as it depended only upon a drunken old smuggler, who had shown that for a bribe he could be anything worse, and the new police, who, we have before remarked, were at their first institution looked upon with no friendly eyes. The case for the prosecution, however, was not yet closed, and something else was coming in reference to motives for the crime, which soon caused opinions to be more decided.

CHAPTER XIX.

THIS new interest in the trial was caused by a call for Lucy, who rose with perfect calmness, and was led in profound silence by the Lord Lieutenant to her conspicuous station in front of the Bench, where the touching traits of her beauty awakened in all around her a sentiment far more creditable than the craving of mere curiosity. They awakened something else in Mr. Cheek. Something that stole away the assumption of insulted dignity, and changed his face to a clammy likeness in wax. His long experience of her depressed nature had made him too sure that she would never have courage to appear against him, but her collected presence at this untoward moment reminded him of all she *could* say, and all that she no doubt *would* say.

"My lord," objected Sergeant Heaviside, plunging up again, to the peril of his learned friends, right and left, "before this young lady is sworn, I submit that her evidence is inadmissible."

"Why so, brother Heaviside?"

"Because, my lord, every person in court will bear me witness that she has been present during the whole of the proceedings."

"My lord," replied Lincoln, "I am sorry the learned sergeant believes it possible that Miss Longland can be biassed by anything she has heard, or any consideration whatever. But I can relieve his mind by the assurance that it is not my purpose to ask a single question connected with anything that has gone before."

"Then let Miss Longland be sworn."

And Mr. Heavyside plunged down again, and seemed to smash his client.

Lucy kissed the book, and fixed her unshrinking regard upon her questioner as if no other person had been present.

"Miss Longland," he said, "I believe I need not ask you if this is the first time you have occupied such a position as that in which you now stand?"

"It is the first," replied Lucy, in her low melodious voice, which was another of her many charms.

"Nor need I remind you that it is the one of all others most calculated to confuse the faculties of persons much more experienced; or that justice, both on the part of the prisoner and the prosecution, requires you to preserve your own in the clear self-possession which I presume is natural to them. You are, I think, the daughter of Sir Harry Longland?"

"His only child." The accents were tremulous,

and there was a slight struggle to maintain composure, in which the counsel endeavoured to assist her with the half smile which accompanied his next question.

“ You do not look quite old enough to object to telling us your age.”

“ I am not quite twenty-two.”

“ Are your parents living ?”

The question was thought barbarous ; but Lincoln had his object, and could not spare her, though his manner did much to support her.

“ I lost my mother at a very early age.”

“ And your father—is he living ?”

The struggle increased, and the tears began to drop from her eyes.

“ Take time, young lady,” interposed the judge.

“ Take time ; no one wishes to give you pain.”

The deep, kind words had a good effect, for they broke through the convulsive effort to restrain her feelings, and nothing was heard for some moments but the low and piteous sound of weeping. When she had recovered herself, she answered the question without needing its repetition.

“ I cannot tell whether my father is living.”

“ Can any one ?”

“ No one but Mr. Cheek, who maintains that he is still in correspondence with him.”

“ Do you believe that statement ?”

“ I do not.”

“ And why do you not ?”

“Because, if my father had been living, he would not have dared to insult me.”

“We will return to that presently. I must now inquire when you last saw Sir Harry.”

“Not since I was six years old.”

“And where have you been living since?”

“With my uncle and aunt Bloomer.”

“The lady who has been examined here this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Doubtless Mrs. Bloomer has been a kind, able, and affectionate guide and protectress; such as to command your full confidence?”

Lucy looked much distressed; and all who had seen Mrs. Bloomer were quite aware of the cause—the judge not less than others.

“Young lady,” he said, in the same encouraging tone, “it is right to tell you that you are at liberty to decline answering any questions with which the Court is willing to dispense. I am sure the learned counsel will not press you——”

“I beg pardon, my lord,” replied Lincoln, who was satisfied with the effect of Lucy’s silence, “I do not press it. You found every reason for confidence in the affection of Mr. Bloomer?”

“His affection has been unbounded.”

“And your confidence in his guidance?”

“My uncle has, for some years, suffered much in health.” She hung her head, and seemed to pray forbearance.

“I have heard his health is now restored?”

"It was so, perfectly, when I last saw him." And here again was a bitter burst of tears, and another pause.

"Since when did his recovery commence?"

"Since he ceased to associate with Mr. Cheek."

Lincoln glanced slightly at the jury, who were keenly alive to every syllable, and then went on to inquire what friends she could have appealed to in case of necessity, and drew from her that she had not had one till within the last three months—that since she had possessed a mind she had found nothing else to depend upon.

"We will now revert, Miss Longland, to the insult which, as an unguided orphan, you received from the prisoner."

Lucy's look assumed a prouder expression, mingled with indignant shame; and her eyes were dried and her colour became deeper as she told the story of Cheek's insolent and daring pretensions, up to the moment when he cowered beneath the presence of Mrs. Toogood and her servant.

"And there was no one to whom you could complain of his encroachments before?"

"If there had been, I should not have dared. For years he held a terrible dominion over my fears, and I could only defy it in the last extremity. He paralyzed me by a basely affected concern for my father's reputation—for his very life, at the hands of justice; and pretended a hideous secret, known only to himself, that my father had, years before, *murdered* a false friend, named Downton."

The style in which she hurled this long kept, agonizing secret before the world astounded more persons than the prisoner. The whole court was in commotion. Every one pressed forward for a better view, and many tongues were loud and ungovernable. The first distinct voice was that of the judge, commanding silence, which he only obtained by warning the disturbers that he should consider them partizans of the prisoner. Then Cheek, driven wild by these public execrations, burst into furious denial that he had ever pretended any secret of the kind, and swore that the tale was invented for the purpose of this prosecution. A malignant falsehood for which the witness was suborned, else why was it never heard of till she knew this Crowley ? A proof that the accusation was founded upon malice and totally incredible !

Heaviside, who had the long table between them, made an acrobatic jump upon it, and off to the dock, where he placed a large hand upon the foaming mouth of his client, and seemed violently to explain that whatever falsehoods he uttered would bring down fresh evidence against him. Lincoln made no attempt to interrupt, but listened patiently and paused, after the table had again cracked under the agile sergeant, to give Cheek an opportunity for as much more denial as he pleased. Prosecutors often profit by the old proverb, touching "rope enough;" and so did Lincoln, who then continued his questions.

"We now proceed, Miss Longland, directly to

the information for which we have invited you here; which is whether you are aware that the prisoner has any particular cause for ill-will against Mr. Crowley?"

She blushed deeper than ever, but knew it was no time for coyness.

"I know not," she replied, "whether I am myself sufficient cause."

"You have told us that you repelled him with scorn and abhorrence."

"I did."

"I am sorry to press you so hard; but I *must* ask whether you have formed any engagement since?"

"Conditionally, on the removal of all stain from the reputation of my father."

"We will attend to that in good time. One question more, and I will trouble you no further. With *whom* have you formed this engagement?"

Her reply was very low, but it was followed by much louder murmurs of satisfaction.

"With Mr. Crowley."

"Miss Longland, I have done."

He now turned his eyes upon Heaviside; but the sergeant had seen the temper of all around him towards both prisoner and witness, and preferred running no risk. Lucy was handed back to her seat.

"I hope, my lord," continued Lincoln, "that I have asked no question to which the answer could in any way be influenced by the evidence which

went before. The witness has had nothing to corroborate ; but I must now endeavour to find something in corroboration of herself,” and he called Moses Pinhorn.

CHAPTER XX.

M R. PINHORN, with his usual placidity, glided up to the witness box. But he had no sooner got there than he underwent a remarkable change. He had, as we have said, brought down with him from London some valuable documents to deliver up to Cox on the completion of their bargain for half shares. These had been carefully tied up in his professional green bag, which had been crammed, in its day, with more ugly contents than any green bag of the Old Bailey. He had left it in the charge of Reuben, who had been brought down for the special purpose, and he now saw it placed, in conformity with the judge's direction, upon the barrister's table. Reuben was standing meekly beside it, and making a mute mouth to advise his parent that if there was any cat in it he had better let her out before she scratched him. He was asked whether he had ever been acquainted with a Mr. John Downton.

"Perfectly well," he replied.

"Of what nature was your acquaintance?"

“ It was various. I sometimes acted as his solicitor.”

“ Did you ever, in that capacity, draw out a deed for him, in relation to Sir Harry Longland ?”

“ I did.”

“ How long ago ?”

“ About fifteen years.”

“ Be good enough to tell us the purport of it.”

“ It was a deed of assignment to Sir Harry Longland, or his nearest of kin, of whatever property might belong to him at the time of his death.”

“ Was that property of any great amount ?”

“ Of none whatever, as I understood at that time; but, at his death, it amounted to very much monies.”

“ What became of that deed ?”

“ I sent it, by my son, to Sir Harry.”

“ Did you ever hear of it afterwards ?”

“ It was returned, with an angry message that I knew it to be worthless.”

“ Did you restore it to Downton ?”

“ I did not. For, though Sir Harry placed no value on it, I thought his successors might. As it was no good to them as long as he lived, I considered it would be safest in my hands.”

“ Do you believe Sir Harry to be still living ?”

“ So Mr. Sheeks assures me.”

“ And how do you account for suffering another person to take possession of the property as heir-at-law ?”

“ I applied to Mr. Sheeks for Sir Harry’s address, thinking that my information of the unexpected

magnitude of the sum conveyed to him might tempt him to retract his refusal, but never could obtain it, or any answer but that he knew Sir Harry would never change his mind; though, if I would give him the deed, he would go abroad to him and try his persuasions."

" You thought that too obliging?"

Moses smiled—if a ghost may be said to smile, and answered "Yes." It was his purpose to deliver it to Miss Longland, whenever she became of age; which Sheeks assured him, very recently, would not be for a long time. He had told Captain Cox, from the beginning, that he would have to refund.

" Where is that deed now?"

" I have brought it here, because I thought it might be inquired for, and you will find it in that bag."

Honest Moses! He had spoken, during the last five minutes, nothing but the truth! And then Sergeant Heaviside spread out his broad and portentous wings to swoop upon the marplot who had spoilt his first cause; notwithstanding his friendly claims for having given him his brief—his intention being merely to prove the deed a forgery and subject his friend to the consequences; which might be justified in law, though not exactly in gratitude. Attention, however, was too much engrossed by the green bag to be diverted by legal terrorism.

" I observed," he began, " that you were sworn on the Old Testament. You are therefore, I suppose, of the Hebrew persuasion?"

It was the stereotyped commencement when a Jew was on the wrong side, and Moses answered it with the bland smile due to an old acquaintance.

“I am of that persuasion.”

“Oh!” replied the sergeant, staring round the court with the usual grimace, which is meant to say, “here’s a rogue who would stick at nothing.”

“You said you were a solicitor. Have you any other profession?”

“I discount bills.”

“Oh!” repeated the sergeant, almost whistling with amazement, and satisfied that pounce the second had been a *coup de grace*. But Moses still lived, and unruffled as ever. Nobody valued the evidence a whit the less; for that deed in the bag had quite taken the wind out of the learned gentleman’s sails. No change of tactics could either sink or damage it; though he proved over and over again that the witness was the most likely sinner in the world to fabricate all he deposed to. The only result he produced was an amusing parallel between Moses the usurer and Izaak the angler, both of them mounted on a safe bank and calmly playing a huge pike that was making a mighty splash to swallow them. There was some disposition to applaud the professor of the gentle craft, and Pike thought it best to break loose.

Lincoln, in the meantime, had untied the bag and drawn out the parchment. But he was not disposed to reveal its contents till he had called another witness or two to remove any chance doubts

that might have been thrown upon it by the cross-examination, and when Moses had made his mild reverence and glided down again, his son Reuben was summoned in his place.

“ You are, I believe, the son of the last witness ?”
Reuben bowed.

“ And have been sworn as a Christian ?”

“ I have, sir.”

“ How long have you been a Christian ?”

“ All my life, sir, in heart, but only recently professed.”

“ Have you any recollection of having carried a deed from your father to Sir Harry Longland, and how long ago ?”

“ About fifteen years ago I carried a deed to that gentleman.”

“ To what effect ?”

“ I am unable to say. I was a very young man, and my father did not think it prudent to employ me in matters of business. I acted only as a messenger.”

“ What is your age now ?”

“ I am thirty-five.”

“ You were twenty, then, when you went to Sir Harry, and should have a perfect recollection of it.”

“ I have, sir, a very perfect one, for circumstances occurred to impress the scene upon my mind very strongly.”

“ Relate what they were.”

“ I was shown to a room in which I was much

struck by the contrast of great splendour with suffering much greater in the appearance of those I saw there. Sir Harry looked very pale and ill, and seemed too much affected to perceive my entrance, for whilst I was waiting to perform my errand, he continued talking like a man distracted. ‘There is no help for it,’ he said; ‘we must part this very night. I must fly from all the world holds dear to me, and die a lonely wanderer, with no other comfort than the trust that God will protect those of whom my follies have made me unworthy.’”

“To whom was this addressed?”

“To a lady who sat by his side, holding his hand, and looking up in the face he strove to hide.”

“About what might have been her age, and what was her appearance?”

“She seemed not more than five or six and twenty, and would have been very beautiful had she not been wasted and pale, and almost death-like.”

“Was any one else present?”

“A gentleman, who held the other hand of the lady, and called her sister. Sir Harry called him Bloomer; opposite to them sat Mr. Cheek, looking over accounts, and groaning at each new document; more, as I thought, than was necessary. And in the room was a nurse-maid crying bitterly, and striving, at the same time, to cheer a beautiful little girl, whom I supposed to be Sir Harry’s daughter, because he started up and took her in his arms, and told her he would soon come back and bring her

play-things. It was then he first saw me and received what I had brought."

"What did he do with it?"

"He showed it in great scorn to Mr. Cheek, and said that Downton did it in mockery, and was a greater villain than he thought him, and flung it down and stamped upon it."

"Should you know that nurse again if you were to see her?"

"I cannot tell, sir; it is many years ago."

"Look round the court and see if she is here."

Reuben did as desired, and after considerable scrutiny, stopped suddenly at a face close to him. It was the face of our old acquaintance, Mrs. Rokins.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, unmindful, and probably quite ignorant, of the rules of a court, "I didn't think that anybody would have knowed me now; I was not so bad to look on then; but now that I've grown old and gray, and lost all my teeth, it is a wonder—that it is—that anybody should know me, better, almost, than I know myself."

Being admonished by an officer that she was out of all order, she hastened to apologise.

"I ask your pardon, gentlefolks, I won't do it again; but fourteen years hence, you'll all be proud if anybody knows you from one another?" and then the good dame was quiet.

"My lord," said Lincoln, "perhaps I should ask pardon too; but I have required the witness to be thus graphic in order to meet any doubts that may be expressed of whether he really was sent with

this deed to Sir Harry Longland fifteen years ago, and not newly instructed to support a forgery.” Then, resuming his examination, he asked what was eventually done with the deed.

“I was ordered, sir, to take it back again, with a peremptory desire that my father was never to insult Sir Harry again with any communication from Mr. Downton.”

“And did you so?”

“I did, sir.”

“And when did you see it last?”

“Never, sir, till this moment, when I see it in your hand.”

“I have nothing more to ask.”

Neither had the sergeant, for his questions had been anticipated.

Mrs. Rokins was then called, and hustled up to the box as if she meant business.

The first questions related to her position in Sir Harry’s family, and whether she had been present at all the examination of the last witness.

“Oh yes, your honour; I heerd every word of it.”

“Then, my lord,” said the sergeant, “I contend that this evidence cannot be received. It is really intolerable in the prosecution to place witnesses in the hearing of each other to show them what they are expected to say.”

“Heart alive,” interrupted the honest dame, “I ain’t a going to say nothing as that gentleman has said, except that I seed him there. He has forgot the best part.”

The sergeant said no more, but sat down in the hope that he should now find an assailable point, and that Mrs. Rokins would overshoot her mark, like Mrs. Bloomer. Lincoln himself looked a little anxious, for she had already said all that he wanted in her recognition of Reuben. He would willingly have ordered her down if he had not felt it would look like apprehension.

“ Well, Mrs. Rokins, and what is the best part ?”

“ Lord love your honour, I'll tell you in no time ; and if you just look at that paper, or whatever it is, that you have in your hand you'll see that I tell you Bible truth. Sir Harry only give it back to Mr. What's-his-name there because it was too tough to tear. He tried two or three times as hard as he was able, but could only tear an inch or so, when he said it was such greasy stuff he must give it up—now you only look.”

Lincoln almost trembled as he unfolded it ; but when he held it up there was the tear, sure enough. It was conclusive testimony to the truth of Reuben, and he sat down, and Sergeant Heaviside got up.

“ So, Mrs. Rokins, it seems you are quite right.”

“ In course I am, your honour.”

“ No doubt of it, Mrs. Rokins, and will be quite as right when you tell me how long it is since you saw this parchment the last time.”

“ Well, sir, I can't exactly say.”

“ Was it yesterday or the day before ?”

“ Lord bless you, neither one nor t'other. The last time I see it was when Sir Harry tore it ; but

whether that's fourteen or fifteen years ago, I can't recollect."

" You swear you have not seen it since ?"

" To be sure not—hain't I said so ?"

Heaviside said no more, for he saw it would be to no purpose.

From the first words in which Reuben described Sir Harry's last day at home, the general gaze had been so suddenly and simultaneously directed to the place where Lucy sat, that it might almost have been thought to cast a flash of light on it, though perhaps this light proceeded from the intelligence as sudden in her own eyes, for she instantly recalled the whole scene and could have sworn to every word that passed. In the apprehension of all who looked upon her she evidently did so, for her look was not less intelligible than her words would have been—and the glance of Lady Goldfield and her friends confirmed the impression. It was a telling one against Cheek, as was evident both in his own face and that of his counsel.

" My lord," said Lincoln, " I believe the authenticity of this deed is now established, but it is right before we examine it, to state a fact which adds much to its importance. A decree in Chancery has been obtained for setting aside the recent sale of the Broome Warren estate, so that, released from the hands of Sir Harry Longland's creditors by the funds dishonestly appropriated by Cox, and from the mock purchase made by the prisoner, it is now included in the provisions here made. If

any doubts have existed of the prisoner's temptation to adopt desperate means for the prize to which he aspired in Miss Longland, I think this may remove them."

The judge took the deed and read it hastily.

"This," he said, "is the strangest incident that has occurred in any trial I remember. How long is it since Sir Harry Longland was heard of?"

"About twelve years," replied Lincoln.

"If he died at that period, what motive are you prepared to assign for the prisoner's assertion to the contrary?"

"We can prove, my lord, that he stopped, and in that case appropriated to himself, as agent to the estate in question, the handsome allowance made to Sir Harry by his creditors."

"How long has Downton been dead?"

"From about the date of Sir Harry's disappearance."

"Whatever fortune is conveyed by this deed, and whatever properties or profits may have been acquired by its suppression, together with the accumulated interest since Downton's death, and likewise the accumulation of all sums stopped for the alleged benefit of Sir Harry Longland, are now, in the event of his death, centred wholly in the young lady who has just been standing before us."

"My lord," said Lincoln, arresting a tumultuous demonstration, "I crave silence for another moment. I have not yet done with the witness,—Mr. Pinhorn, senior." Moses returned to the box. "You

perceive, Mr. Pinhorn, that we have satisfactorily accounted for the abstraction of large sums from the property conveyed by the late Mr. Downton, inasmuch as they have fairly purchased from Sir Harry's creditors the family estate, and it may be fortunate for you that such is the case. I have now to ask you whether you are aware of the abstraction of any other sums, and for what purpose. Your answer may explain something you said, in another place, last night, and spare us the necessity of confronting you with Captain Cox."

Moses having been thoroughly awakened from his long dream of half shares, saw no farther impediment to a hope of recovering his own failing credit.

"There were," he replied, "many sums abstracted, which I discovered had been lent by Captain Cox to Lord Goldfield."

"Well, sir, we will not ask how you discovered that. But how do you know the accommodations to Lord Goldfield were from that particular source?"

"Because Captain Cox had no other, and lived, up to his uncle's death, upon a small allowance."

"Very good. And what did you do upon this discovery?"

"I warned him to replace them."

"And did he so?"

"He did win them back from Lord Goldfield as fast as he lent them, and I saw them re-invested."

"Very good, Mr. Pinhorn; and again very fortu-

nate. Can you inform us to what extent Lord Goldfield is now indebted to Captain Cox?"

"To the extent of the usuries, but nothing more."

"And these usuries are to be levied upon money which did not belong to him?"

"That is the truth."

"I suppose then we may alter the word usuries into robberies?"

"That is the truth also."

"Then Lord Goldfield, whose ruin has made such a noise in the world, has paid his debts in full."

"He has paid them in full, and is no more ruined than the Bank of England. He will bear witness that I told him so last night."

"Thank you, sir; I have nothing more to ask. You may go down."

The public joy—which had begun to explode when Lucy, in one necromantic moment, was hailed lady of the lands of her fathers—had only been restrained by the manner of Lincoln, which showed that his triumph was not completed, and when the miraculous turn for the house of Goldfield so suddenly burst upon it, the shouts were tumultuous. The cries of congratulation, which the judge had neither power nor inclination to silence, could not have been more universal had the same fortune befallen every soul in court. Lady Goldfield and Lucy, and the almost screaming Polly Lightfoot, forgetful of the multitude, clasped each other

in their arms ; and the other important persons on the bench—who now amounted to a good many—grouped themselves around them in a general disorder, which, in such a place, was perhaps never witnessed before. The first face in which the glow of transport subsided was the pale and lovely one of Lucy. Where was her father ? There was no blessed triumph for him ; and his history remained in the same gloom that had blighted her from the days of childhood ! [She was the Peri that had won the gates of Paradise, and found them closed.

CHAPTER XXI.

BUT the trial was not over yet. The main issue, which was whether Cheek was guilty of conspiring to murder Crowley, was only so far affected by the examination of Lucy as might afford a strong presumption against him. The direct evidence still rested almost entirely upon Bunckle, and this was now to be strengthened, and Lucy's assertions to be more positively verified, which was a difficult matter in the face of Cheek's contradiction, and only to be settled by relative credibility. The prosecution had foreseen this contradiction, and arranged the order of the witnesses accordingly, keeping what was more irresistible to follow her, instead of preceding, as in ordinary cases it would have done. They had another and much greater object in view, which was to make Cheek's story against Sir Harry a legitimate part and parcel of the charge upon which he was indicted.

To accomplish these ends, Lincoln now appalled his audience by calling, as it seemed, upon a wit-

ness from the dead ; and his call was straightway answered by the apparition of Aaron Daunt. He was received with demonstrations of terror, for he was scarred and scorched in a manner that made life a miracle. His hair was entirely singed from his head, one of his hands was in a sling, and the other contracted as if he had not yet power to straighten it ; and though the present he had received from Crowley, at the hands of Nelly, had enabled him to appear in decent clothing, his movements showed perfectly what must be the state of the frame within it. But his courage was too high to care for what he considered trifles, and he stood unmoved upon his pedestal above the crowd, like the figure of a man in cast iron.

Not such was the appearance of Cheek, for his pulses seemed to strike fire that flared out of his eyes, more dazzling than the torches that were now darting through the dark court to light up the gas. In a few moments a bright blaze intensified the reflection of the mirror slanting over him, and revealed every self-accusing quiver of his countenance. His counsel stared as if he would rather have seen a spectre than a living man, and considered such odds against him a very unwarrantable surprise.

Preliminaries being disposed of, Lincoln began the examination by asking Aaron whether he was acquainted with the prisoner. He was answered that no one knew him better.

“ How long have you known him ?”

"Nearly twenty years."

"Where did your acquaintance commence?"

"At Broome Warren Chase, where I often attended my master on long visits."

"What was your master's name, and where is he?"

"His name was Downton. He was murdered twelve years ago on the beach at Dover."

"Were you his servant at that time?"

"I was."

"Relate what you remember of that circumstance."

The sergeant scrambled up.

"My lord, I cannot see what on earth the murder of a Mr. Downton, which happened a dozen years ago, can have to do with a case which occurred in the present month, unless it is to tire out and confuse the jury, till they mistake one for the other."

It was an unlucky speech, for the jury did not like to be thought liable to such mistakes; and Mr. Nib, the attorney, whom we have seen before, and who was now sitting as their foreman, begged his lordship would pardon him for saying that they particularly desired to hear something of that murder, as Miss Longland's evidence had been strongly contradicted in respect to it; and, in justice to both parties, it was important to hear everything that could bear upon it.

"I quite agree with you, sir, and am glad to see so much intelligence," answered the judge. "It is my duty and desire to grudge no time to enquiry

which the counsel, who have studied the case more than we have, may think necessary."

The sergeant scrambled down again, and Lincoln resumed.

"Your lordship and the jury have correctly divined our intentions, and I will now repeat my desire."

The answer was long and circumstantial, and continued down to the period at which Aaron left London with his master, on the duelling expedition described by Lucy some chapters back; from thence we will take it up *verbatim*.

"We came to Dover about mid-day, and put up at the chief hotel, where we found three or four other persons waiting for us. I knew they were professional money lenders, and soon discovered that my master had not come to fight, but to entrap the gentleman he had so wronged and ruined; and I resolved to defeat the plot. My master himself unwarily assisted, by sending me round to all the other hotels, to learn whether Sir Harry had yet arrived. In one of them I met Mr. Cheek, who was expecting him. Knowing him to be in Sir Harry's confidence, I gave him notice of what was intended, that he might be on the watch for every boat from France, and warn Sir Harry back again. It happened to be a stormy day, and the sea soon became too dangerous to cross. Towards night it was impossible, and Mr. Downton was very impatient. He went several times to the beach to look out, and continued to do so till a very late hour,

though there was no light but the foam of the waves. We sat up till past two o'clock in the morning, when the London mail came in, and one of the persons who alighted was Mr. Cheek, who had been in Dover all day. He came into the house a good deal disturbed, as I thought, and I asked the guard and coachman where they had taken him up. I found he had walked out to meet them, and I believed it was to conceal how long he had been at Dover. I thought it odd, and he saw I did, and cautioned me in a friendly manner not to speak of it, for fear it should come to the ears of my master that he had held communication with me, and do me mischief.

"My master had then been absent on the beach for nearly two hours, and his friends were apprehensive that something must have happened. Some of us went out in search, and after awhile we found him lying dead and almost stiff. He had been shot, more than an hour before."

Many persons turned quickly to the dock, and then to one another.

"Had you any suspicion of who had done that deed?"

"I hardly knew whether I had or not at the time. Cheek's conduct was strange, but I thought it might have been caused by anxiety for Sir Harry, who was very likely to have been lost."

"Did you entertain any suspicion at any time afterwards?"

"I did; but none more positive till I returned to

Broome Warren after a ten years' transportation, on a charge which, during my absence, had been proved false. I went to Mr. Cheek as an old acquaintance, for relief in my necessity, and he nearly fell into fits at the sight of me. It was then plain that he had cause to fear me. I was the more startled by an accidental conversation with Miss Longland, the same night, when I helped her uncle home from Mr. Cheek's house. I told her my name, which she had known in childhood, and she was in much agitation. She asked me whether she had any reason to live in apprehension of Cheek, and I perceived, from some unwary words, that she was in great terror about her father and Mr. Downton. This set me to watch Cheek closely, and I was soon convinced he had led her to fear that her father had committed the crime. This strengthened my belief against himself. I resolved to hesitate no longer, and set off the next day to see what could be discovered at Dover."

"And what transpired there?"

"I found the landlord still living. On mentioning the almost forgotten murder he immediately recollected me, from my rather uncommon stature, and also from something peculiar in the manner with which I had enquired for an arrival from France. What he told me he is here to repeat. The waiter, he said, had left him, but was well worth seeking, as he had made observations of an ugly nature on some stranger in the house. I was determined on finding this man, but, as it might take

time, I returned to tell Miss Longland what I had done. In this I was disappointed. She was away on a visit, and I never saw her, for by another false charge I was again sent to prison. From thence I escaped, and took refuge in a barn belonging to Cheek. Here I again fell in with him."

From hence the examination varied in nothing from what had already been given, and continued to Aaron's escape, when Cheek was taken into custody.

"What then became of you?"

"I returned to the forest, where I learnt from John Bunckle that he had been present at Cheek's examination before the magistrates, where he had accused me of stealing his gun, and there was great want of a tin box, which, it was feared, would be melted in the fire. I knew it well, for I had seen him busied with it, and had seen it that night in the open flooring of the barn. It might contain, I thought, both the means of vengeance and of justice, and I resolved at all risks to save it. My limbs can show the scorching."

"Did you recover that box?"

"I did not. I found the place where I had seen it, but it was melted, and everything in it consumed, except one or two articles which were not perishable."

"What were they?"

"One of them was the steel plate of a pocket-book, which had belonged to my former master."

All that had been said through the trial made nothing like the impression of these words.

“How do you know it belonged to him?”

“Because his name is engraved upon it.”

“Had he any pocket-book so engraved?”

“He had; and it was the only property missing from his person when we found him. He always carried it in his breast-pocket, and used to say that it contained a fortune in bets, and a list of the many investments he had made.”

“Was this well known?”

“It was known to everybody, for he never talked of anything so much as his money. And whoever shot him knew well enough where to look for the account of it; for the great coat, and the one beneath, had been unbuttoned at the breast, and no other part of the dress had been touched.”

“Did you take what you had found to the magistrates?”

“I did not. I was accused of robbery and attempted murder, and was obliged to bide my time. I took it to Mr. Badger, the solicitor of Sir Harry, but found he had gone to Oakendell. I then went to Dover again, to see if that waiter had been heard of, and found him. He returned with me yesterday to Mr. Badger, whom I also found, and is now here.”

“What did you do with that plate?”

“I have it here.”

“Let me see it,” said the judge.

And Aaron took from his pocket a paper parcel

containing all the relics he had collected, amongst which was the blackened morsel scarce larger than half-a-crown, and engraved with the name of John Downton. After spelling over the inscription, with a look which showed the importance he attached to it, he sent it to the jury.

Sergeant Heaviside perceived the effect produced by it, and rose with vehemence to protest against the line of examination, as not only irrelevant to the trial in process, but absolutely involving a charge against the prisoner of a crime for which he was not indicted; and for which, in case of such indictment, he would have to go before another court.

" You are undoubtedly right, brother Heaviside," replied the judge, " in your last point, for if the prisoner is charged with a capital crime in the county of Kent, he will of course be moved from hence to take his trial at Maidstone, which will give you some days to prepare your defence. With respect to the course pursued here, I can by no means admit its irrelevancy. I hold it, on the contrary, to be imperatively necessary to the confirmation of a very chief witness, whom the prisoner has charged with false evidence. If, in the course of establishing that witness's credit we come incidentally upon facts detrimental to his own, we cannot help it any more than we can pronounce judgment on them."

The sergeant was again silenced, and the prisoner supported himself by clinging fast to his bar. They

were neither of them noticed, for every heart leaped to the place where Lucy had sunk on the bosom of Lady Goldfield, and all was confusion. They essayed to take her out, but she passionately resisted, and her imploring accents drew more tears from all who heard her than the moans of many a culprit.

Cheek, in the meantime, was not too prostrate to see the effect of that small steel plate. He again lost all control of himself, and took his case into his own hands, demanding who could prove that Sir Harry Longland had not likewise been at Dover on the day before the murder, and afterwards given him the charge of that pocket-book—too dangerous to keep in his own hands, but too valuable to suggest a risk for a faithful agent? Had it not the day before been calm enough to cross the channel? Had not the provocation been offered to Sir Harry? Had not the challenge proceeded from *him*? Was it not he who sought the vengeance, and was his agent, who came by his command, with his case of pistols, to suffer for the act for which he had no motive? True, he had denied his awful communication to Miss Longland, but had she not done worse in betraying his confidence, only made to control a tongue that was for ever talking of her father, whose safety depended upon silence? Was he to blame if his fidelity and friendship forced him to deny a fact so fatal? She must take the consequence of her rashness! He must admit the truth in his own defence! Sir Harry Longland's

was the hand that committed that murder, and Miss Longland's silence for years was a proof that she believed it true.

His terrible extremity had made him more eloquent if not so deep as his counsel, and visibly created some indecision amongst the jury, who being chiefly provincial tradesmen and persons of that standing, are often seen to be more staggered by strong assertion than steadied by sober argument. Sergeant Heaviside began to recover his confidence in the final harangue he was to make for the defence, for though the cross questions he had first to launch at Aaron were mere hail-stones on a rock, that sent them back in the teeth of the tempest, he felt the convulsions of Cheek to have thrown up one of those mysterious eruptions from the deep which sometimes astonish the world with a new found land, and that if it generally disappears as suddenly as it rises was pretty sure to be an unassailable rampart as long as he should want it. Nothing that he lost in his conflict with Aaron could tell against this vantage ground, and when he had sufficiently stunned his hearers with rhetorical intonations and terrified them with his last grimace, he flung himself down in his seat with a flaring flush of defiance.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHEEK, though so far from a reasonable being during Aaron's examination, had now reason enough to perceive that his own wild interruption and the revived energies of his counsel had produced great embarrassment upon the faces of every one around him, not even excepting the hitherto self-possessed counsel against him. Lincoln, for the first time appeared doubtful of how to meet what he had no means of contradicting, for the witnesses whom Aaron had brought from Dover had to speak of a time long passed, and could hardly be expected to have memories that would not leave many openings for dangerous cross-examination which might turn them against himself. Still notwithstanding the strong evidence he had brought forward and the universal belief in it, his case was decidedly weakened, for belief is nothing in law without proof to sustain it, and he had no choice left but to run the hazard ; and accordingly he called the Dover landlord.

The landlord had a perfect recollection of the murder and likewise of Aaron, for the reasons which

Aaron himself had just mentioned. He also recollect ed that a gentleman who gave no name had lodged with him the day before and the day after the event. He remembered he was out late on that particular night because they had been obliged to keep the house open for him, and that when he came in he said he had been detained at another hotel, where there was a great stir about somebody who was said to have been shot upon the beach. It was a terrible thing that people could not walk about so near the town without being murdered, and he hoped with all his heart the villain would be found out. It had frightened him so that he had hardly dared to come back by himself, and was so agitated that he should be glad of a stiff glass of gin and water to set him up.

“Had you any farther conversation with him?”

“No, sir, I never had any but this I speak of, for he kept himself to himself, and I didn’t like him well enough to intrude. There was something about him, I can’t exactly say what, that made me keep my distance. I could not help thinking that he spoke very strongly about the affair for a person who had no concern in it, bad as it was, and that it was very odd it should make him sick enough to require gin and water.”

“Did you suspect him to be the very man he wished to see found out?”

“Well, sir, I believe I had some thoughts of that kind, but as I had so little to go upon it might have got me into trouble to speak of them.”

“Should you know him if you saw him again?”

“I can’t say whether I should or not. It’s a long time ago, and folks who drink gin and water are apt to change more than others.”

“Look at the prisoner and tell me whether he is the man.”

The landlord looked for some time, and then shook his head.

“I can’t say, sir. He is about the same height but a good deal stouter; though, to be sure, most people get stouter as they grow older. If I was to see him walked out I could tell better, for the walk of my customer was something particular.”

“In what way?”

“Well, he had a slouch or a stoop, as if he had lost something and was always looking for it; but, perhaps, it may be of no use to say that, now that I’ve spoken of it, for you see it might make him as bolt upright as a May-pole.”

“Will you swear one way or the other—that you do or do not recognize him?”

“No, sir, I can’t; but I’ll swear I think he recognizes me.”

“Why so?”

“Because there’s no occasion that I can see to put on so many faces when the gentleman knows we only want one. And then the more I look at him the more he takes the colour of my customer when he said he was frightened.”

“Observing that, do you swear to him now?”

“Why, no, sir; I can’t say I do; for if anybody

was to stare in my face for something to hang me I think I should turn as yellow as that gentleman."

The "other side" began to laugh, and after a few more questions, Lincoln saw there was nothing to be done with him. As he had done no harm he was not cross-questioned, but every one had seen enough to feel that Cheek had made another narrow escape.

The two waiters swore boldly that he was very like the suspected customer, and one of them went far enough to be very dangerous. He had taken in the gin and water and found the stranger in such a nervous state that when he opened the door he sprang up from his chair and ran towards the window. He said he hoped he had not entered too suddenly and startled him from sleep, and was answered in a confused manner that it was true he had been asleep, though he had been stamping heavily about the room before the door was opened. What the witness had said was only to avoid suspicion that he had thought the action very remarkable.

"Did you see anything more?"

"Yes, sir. Half an hour after, I went to the room again to ask if anything more was wanted, in case I should find the gentleman still sitting up, but more to see if he was gone to bed, for it was then three o'clock. He again started violently, and I saw he was wiping out the pan of a pistol. This time I didn't know what to say, and he saved me the necessity of saying anything. He told me in the

same hurried way that he had rung for a bed candle, but he certainly had not, for the bells were over my head in the hall where I had been waiting. He then went on to wonder why there was not a better police at Dover: that there seemed to be nothing but cutthroats, and nobody ought to sleep without a pistol under his pillow. He had unpacked his own and was just loading them and should take care to lock his door."

"Was Dover so full of danger?"

"I never heard of any before that night."

"Did he go to bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you form any more suspicions?"

"I did, sir. I was the principal waiter, and my sleeping-place was below stairs, as security for the plate in use. The maid-servants slept above. I had not been there long when I was awakened by a knock at the door. One of them had come down in alarm, and said that she believed the strange gentleman was taken ill, for she had heard odd noises in his room. I was soon ready, and followed her cautiously that we might not be heard by the rest of the house, and we both stopped at the door to listen. For a few moments we heard nothing but the sounds of a heavy and disturbed sleep, when all at once we were startled by a low and fearful exclamation of, 'Hark!'"

The waiter, as is often the case in that class of men, was a very intelligent one, and grew more

animated as he went on. He was listened to with great attention.

"We thought we had been heard, and were creeping away when the voice began again. 'A rough night,' it said, or rather gargled in the throat, 'How the wind roars!' And we could distinguish the sound of shuddering and writhing till the bed seemed coming down. Then all was quiet for a moment, but the grinding of teeth. The next words were, 'Surely he will be here to see if the boat is lost—no danger of that, the fool! There's more for himself! Hush! I saw him in that flash of the moon! Stand still! It blows a hurricane—they could not hear a pistol?' There was a long lull, and we thought the dream, or whatever it was, had passed away. We thought we had better go back to our rooms, when the voice broke out again in a frightful whisper—'What's this? His pocket-book! Nobody sees—run, for your life, run.' And once more the bed shook till the curtain-rings jingled. There was another interval of grinding teeth, which was presently succeeded by exclamations more dreadful. 'Ha!' he cried out, 'what do you do here? They told me you were dead! What should a dead man care about his daughter! Who groaned that secret in the grave? You could not bribe him with your bones! Leave me alone! Away to your coffin—yah!' The words rose louder into shrieks of agony, and our terror at such imaginations was little less, perhaps, than might have been caused by the visions themselves. The girl screamed out, and we

dashed open the door, and shook him with all our might, for he struggled very long, as if he still believed himself in the clutch which had seemed to choke him. By degrees his throes abated, and his eyes glared in our dim light. ‘Where am I,’ he at last said, in complete exhaustion. ‘Is this Dover?’ I told him it was, and tried to persuade him that a change of position might allow him to sleep better. ‘Sleep!’ he answered. ‘I’ve had sleep enough! Did I talk in my sleep?’ ‘A little, sir’—and he shook almost as much as before. ‘Hark you both—there’s money in my pocket. Take what you will, but tell nobody of the malady I’m subject to. I fear it is epileptic, and that might be a great injury to a man in business. Sometimes I have thought myself King Herod slaughtering the Innocents—sometimes I’ve been Judas Iscariot. Whatever you do, don’t tell! And don’t leave me! Take as much as you like, but don’t leave me!’

Lincoln had not interrupted a word of this long account, for he saw the impression it was making, and he now only asked “What more?”

“When he was more quiet, sir, he enquired if anybody had been ‘after him,’ which he altered into ‘anybody to call upon him.’ I answered that if he expected any one the visit would probably be later, as it was still only four o’clock. ‘Later,’ he replied, staring and breathing quick; ‘yes, of course, I meant yesterday.’ ‘Only the person you saw, sir, who called himself Aaron Daunt.’”

“Stop,” said Lincoln, “we have it in his evidence

that he went to see Mr. Cheek, and Cheek therefore must have been the name of your dreamer."

Heaviside fiercely jumped up to declare the inference most unjustifiable, and of a piece with all the proceedings, from end to end. The hotel at Dover must have had many inmates, and the prisoner, if he was truly there, was no more than others to be selected for a scape-goat.

He would have gone on with a storm, but the judge stopped him with an admonition that whatever unfairness might be alleged, it was equally unfair to assail the prosecution till his turn came; and the sergeant sat down and knitted his bushy brows in dissent. The waiter, however, having little more to say, was soon at his disposal, and he jumped up again.

"Now, sir," he said, with foaming derision, "you have told us a great deal, but you forgot to tell us how much you took from your friend's 'regimental small clothes' for the silence of a dozen years!"

"I took nothing, sir."

"Indeed! you were conscientious. It is to be hoped your partner, the chambermaid, knew her business better. How much might *she* have taken?"

"Not more than I did, sir."

"Surprisingly forgetful! Is she here now?"

"She is not."

"And why not?"

"Because she married some years ago, and we don't know what afterwards became of her."

“Did you enquire?”

“No, sir, we did not.”

“I thought so. People in such a fright as you describe don’t always keep to the same story. Our learned friend did not call upon you to identify the prisoner; can you tell us why?”

“Because, I suppose, he thought it would be of no use.”

“Of no use—precisely.”

“No doubt he knew that our house is much frequented, and that it is quite impossible to single out individuals who have come and gone every day for twelve years.”

“And yet he was rather persevering with your master to swear black was white; and you, if I mistake not, have a sharper wit than he has, and can identify any two persons you ever saw. Try—it would be doing the other side a great service, and our learned friend has a breeches pocket as well as your dreamer.”

The witness had spirit to return the sneer, and made no reply. The judge hoped that brother Heaviside would abstain from such hints and imputations.

“My lord, I stand corrected,” replied the sergeant with mock humility, for he had come to a disagreeable feeling that the judge would sum up with a leaning to the opposition. Turning to the witness, he resumed.

“The learned gentleman under his lordship will not object to my adoption of his own words. Will

you swear one way or the other that you do or do not recognise the prisoner?"

"I have given my reasons why I cannot, and there is another still in the great difference of dress."

"Oh! I understand. How was the dreamer dressed?"

"Very much as if he had been living low in the country. In a drab shooting jacket, and drab waistcoat and trousers, none of which fitted him—very different indeed from the velvet and gold of the prisoner."

"Ah, I'm afraid the drab suit can hardly have lasted a dozen years. There is usually a 'cry of players' in the town on these occasions, and I marvel much that my learned friend did not borrow from the 'properties' to dress him according to your directions. No doubt you could have recognised him *then*, for whoever doubted that Mr. Kemble and Mr. Kean were Cardinal Wolsey, and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark? Will none of the gentlemen farmers we see about us decorate my client with a coat, waistcoat, and breeches—they will be all the better for not fitting? What, none! Then I'm afraid you must swear to him as he stands; or if you can't you had better go back to Dover."

And Sergeant Heavyside having succeeded in obtaining a laugh, sat down, with a look of comical derision which might have won it without the aid of his wit.

Lincoln had gained as much as he expected, for

though these last witnesses would have been of great value with a personal recollection, they were nothing without it. The only part of their story that told in his favour was that Aaron had seen the Dover stranger whom he now swore to be Cheek. But Aaron's history, as we have said already, made it dangerous to depend on him; and the difficulty remained of how to deal with that incredible charge without the means of contradicting it. He could not see his way through it, but it would never do to let the case go to the jury as it stood, and with an evident design of gaining time for decision, he turned to address the judge.

"My lord," he said, "I think I may have to recall some of the witnesses, and not being prepared to say what time they may occupy, or how much I may require to address the jury, I beg to remind your lordship that it is now six o'clock, and that they have sat without intermission for nine hours. Such long confinement and their great attention, with the oppressive atmosphere of these densely crowded walls, must have much fatigued them, and I therefore petition for a short adjournment, during which they may benefit by less confined air, and an opportunity of otherwise refreshing themselves for the performance of what may still be a long and laborious duty."

"I have no objection," replied the judge; "for though long habit has inured me to very protracted sittings, I can well understand the hardship they

may be to many who bear them perhaps for the first time. The court may be adjourned for half-an-hour."

With which he ordered the prisoner to be removed, and retired from the bench.

The jury thankfully availed themselves of their short respite, and many others were glad to change their constrained positions, some to go out, and some to compare opinions with their friends, by which the formalities hitherto observed were for the time broken up.

But the relaxation was no more than personal, for there was scarcely a face in which suspense and troubled foreboding were not more marked than at any other period of the day. Lucy, who at the moment of Cheek's assertions against her father, comprising as they did her own belief in them, would willingly have died to embody a flash of lightning that might strike him dead, had been incapable at first of comprehending the full effect of his inspiration, but her perceptions were sharpened to the quick, and directed unerringly when she heard the muttered thoughts of many hundreds, and beheld the eager appeals from one to another, who made no question of the falsehood but how the law could dispose of it. Who was to prove it, and who could deny that, barring Sir Harry's former reputation for honour, it conformed in a perilous degree with probability? This was her true interpretation of the upraised hands and scowls of indignation, and she dropped her head

upon her knees with the only hope left her that she never might raise it again.

At this juncture a messenger was seen forcing his way impatiently, with a note in his hand, and when he had succeeded he held it up and called out—

“Is any gentleman here whose name is Philpot?”

Tom, who was at some distance, looking everywhere for Lord Goldfield, who had escaped him in the confusion which hailed the extraordinary turn in the fortunes of Lucy, could only make himself heard in a voice that informed everybody, and attention being thus attracted, they pushed each other aside to allow him a passage. As he received the note and read it before the multitude of curious eyes, it seemed to have a wonderful effect, for he rushed out with the messenger, regardless of whom he might overturn.

What could be the matter? Lady Goldfield became pale as death, for she had seen her son pursue Moses from the court, with the look he must have worn in the madness of the last evening, of which, in a search for her lost letter, she had learnt too much. But she still said nothing; nor did she dare to speak, when a few minutes after, the man returned in the same haste with a summons for Mr. Badger and Mr. Lincoln, who after a brief word, followed him with the much-amazed Crowley.

What could be the matter, again! Surprise

became alarm ; people looked on each other with distended eyes, but none made enquiries which none could answer ; and thus the half-hour expired. Those who had seats were actively resuming them. The jury returned as gravely as they had gone out, and Lincoln came back to his place with an evidence that something of the last importance had occurred ; but the face of a lawyer is part of his profession, and defies all scrutiny. Mr. Badger remained absent. When all was ready the judge was in his chair, and Cheek was again placed before him.

Lincoln directly began.

“ My lord, the prisoner having admitted that he impugned the testimony of Miss Longland with a falsehood, I might here have closed my case had he not in so far restoring her credit, again astonished us by declaring that she was aware of her father’s guilt when she volunteered her charge of a wicked invention. Had his words been true, we should only have insulted your lordship and the jury by producing such a witness ; but we think we can defend her still, and confirm every word that has been uttered by others. We have another witness, whom in deference to the learned sergeant’s objection to everything extraneous and irrelevant, we might perhaps have reserved for another court ; but if the prisoner *will* have it so, we must call him here.”

The sensation which he had previously caused by the summons of a witness whose ashes were be-

lieved to have been scattered by a whirlwind, was now fully equalled by his staking his last hope upon one long since reputed to have lost the better half of his senses, and within the last few days to have likewise vanished from the living world. The witness he now called into court was the Reverend William Bloomer.

CHAPTER XXII.

A NOTHER instant, and a faint cry of transport from Lucy proclaimed his approach, and he made his entrance supported on one side by Crowley, and on the other—could it be?—by his *bonne ange* of France, whose pity had not tired till she restored her *brave* to the care of his friends. She looked much worn and dishevelled by sleepless travelling, for the only moments for repose had been during the short passage across the channel, and by snatches through a night and a day in the express train, but her eyes were bright and exulting to perceive the arrival was just in time; and the determined old Vicar came as living as his hopes to prove he was not so crazed as report had represented him. Living indeed, and with life enough to animate a graveyard, from which, when he had mounted his elevation, and flung his eyes about for a signal to begin his great work, his wild gray hair and disordered wrappings appeared to have just shot up.

“There is no need of haste, sir,” said Lincoln,

who saw that he had scarce breath to speak. “ You come in very good time. Compose yourself, and I will trouble you as little as I can.”

To which end he began his task with the care and deliberation he might have used to unwind a skein that is easy to break and hard to keep out of tangle, confining himself for some time to such light enquiries as might bring out the details of the recent expedition, without touching on the more important ones to follow. All that we know of his escape from London, his acquisition at the ready-made repository, the loss of his purse, the voyage, the first acquaintance with the French lady, the prison, and the manner in which he had been bought out, was extracted without producing any dangerous excitement, and in order to establish the necessary fact that, whatever he might appear, he was as sane as anyone present. This preface was not only satisfactory, but obtained both for the Vicar and the grateful womanly hand that had befriended him, a very unmistakable display of admiration. Lincoln then went more directly to business.

“ You have told us, sir, that you are the Vicar of Broome Warren, and that you went to Boulogne to satisfy some grave suspicions against the prisoner. Were you acquainted with him ?”

“ I would to God I never had been.”

“ Had you any cause to think ill of him ?”

“ On the contrary ; I thought him the best member of my congregation.”

"Up to what period?"

"To the time when Lucy—that is, my niece, Miss Longland—first told me of his insolent pretensions, which he had dared to enforce by a charge against her father, my brother-in-law, of committing a murder."

"Are you acquainted with any one else who is particularly interested in the event of this trial?"

"Yes; I am acquainted with Mr. Crowley, with whom her marriage depends on it."

Lincoln turned to Sergeant Heaviside with a smile that said, "Make the best of that!" Which the sneer of the sergeant showed him fully prepared to do. But his "learned friend" went on undismayed at the consequence, and asked the Vicar whether he was quite sure that this engagement might not make him a partial witness.

"Proceed, and you will see," replied the Vicar, firmly.

"You then decided upon giving evidence for the prosecution?"

"I decided upon hunting the whole earth for it."

"You had none to give at that time?"

"None, at that time; but I have found plenty since."

"Take breath, sir; we are in no hurry. How did you obtain it?"

"By going, as I have said, to Boulogne, in search of a friend, who, I believed, could prove he lied in his throat."

“Who was that friend?”

“His name was Seymour—a clergyman, like myself, and a much better one.”

“Did you find him?”

“No—he was dead.”

Cheek, who had recovered his defiant look from the sneer of his counsel, had suffered a great revulsion at the name of Seymour, but the news of his death was so sudden a restorative that the sergeant and most others were chilled and thrilled as they would have been by a direct confession that Mr. Seymour’s information would have been fatal. Notwithstanding the renewed expression of dignity and injured innocence, they saw that he was not so well out of the maze as he thought. It would be a great blessing for malefactors if it were a rule to try them in a mask, as was proved by the next reply.

“Then you obtained no intelligence at Boulogne?”

“Yes; by God’s blessing, I did. I learnt he had left a widow, who was living very near, and could tell as much as himself. She remembered Sir Harry, because he had died in their house.”

“How long before?”

“A good many years. I have brought the date.”

“Why did they never inform his daughter, or yourself?”

“They did, but the letters were intercepted.”

“By whom?”

"By his agent. By that man whose face confesses it. By him to whom Sir Harry referred them in his last moments. By Cheek, whom he had appointed to meet him at Dover. To him they wrote, enclosing other letters to apprise us of the death, and whatever property had been left, in money and gold ornaments, and a miniature of his wife—my sister; all to be delivered with his last blessing to my child, Lucy—to her whom you see shuddering on the breast of that noble lady—to her who has passed twelve years of her short life in wailing the desertion of a parent, forgetful of the last drop of his blood—disowned by all who had honoured him."

The old man's burst of indignation was choked by uncontrollable emotion; but whilst it still trembled through the walls, attention was again diverted by an infuriate denial from Cheek, who, scared by the terrors closing round him, called all that was sacred to witness that he had never received a line or a token. Whatever discretion he may have possessed—and he never was famous for much—was taking rapid leave of him, and he went on like a balloon without ballast, knocking itself hither and thither, and bound for nowhere but destruction. Every word towards detection was a fabrication, though proved by the first word that followed, and the last that had gone before. There were no such people as the Seymours; Sir Harry Longland was not dead; the whole was a plot to overwhelm the man who could bring him to jus-

tice, and committed to a delirious dotard, because everybody else was afraid or ashamed of it. And in this strain he went on, in spite of all effort to stop him, as long as fear and fury allowed articulation. Lincoln was obliged to continue his questions as occasion offered.

“Pay no attention, Mr. Bloomer, to what the prisoner may say. You spoke of letters to him from Mr. Seymour; have you any proof beyond what has been told you?”

The Vicar had fixed his eyes upon Cheek with a stare of stupefaction, for it was almost impossible to identify him with the “worthy parishioner—the excellent Christian” who had so recently and for so many years poured “a leetle drop more” of consolation upon his matrimonial troubles. Sore must his condition have been to seek comfort from such a source! Yet he had sought it; and, as far as forgetfulness could answer the purpose, had found it. There are those on whom even the kindness that will not bear examination will leave a touching impression, and the Vicar answered the last question with the fatal proofs he had done so much to obtain, as if he felt them far more affecting than they need have been.

“I think,” he said, “the letters may be sufficiently proved by the answers, which have been preserved as receipts; and I have them here.”

Two letters were handed to the counsel, who read them carefully, and then turned to the judge.

“My lord, there must be many persons in court

who can identify the prisoner's writing. I call on them to stand forward."

A great many of the farmers and tradespeople of Broome Warren presented themselves, and mounted the box, one after another, beside Mr. Bloomer. They all deposed on oath that both letters were written by Cheek, and came down again without further question.

"Read them," said the judge.

The first was addressed, with the Dover post-mark, to the late Mr. Seymour. It expressed deep sorrow at the death of Sir Harry Longland; acknowledged a sum of money, a watch, a gold chain, and a miniature picture, and ended by requesting a certificate of the burial. The second, similarly addressed, and dated two days after, conveyed the prisoner's thanks for the said certificate, which had come safe to hand.

"What is the date of it?" demanded the judge.

"We do not know, my lord, and believe it to have been consumed in the box alluded to."

A small piercing ray flashed up from Cheek's glistening eyes, for, without the date, he might still maintain that Sir Harry had been in Dover previous to the murder.

"Can the witness," continued the judge, "say anything to this point?"

"I can, my lord."

"Did you, when at Boulogne, examine the public register?"

"I did, my lord, and found the leaf which must have contained the entry copied by Mr. Seymour carefully cut out. I have brought the clerk of that chapel who had charge of it to account for the abstraction."

"Brother Heaviside, do you wish to ask the witness any questions?"

The sergeant declined.

"Then, Mr. Bloomer, we need not detain you longer. Your evidence has been given with remarkable clearness, and your toilsome efforts for the ends of justice do you much honour."

His faithful protectress had kept her watch close by, with Crowley by her side, and they helped him speedily from the most painful scene of his life. The last witness called was the clerk from Boulogne.

His story was precisely what he had told when we last saw him, and he had come provided with the register, which he thought could explain something more. The leaf which immediately followed the missing one bore the date of November the twenty-first; Sir Harry Longland must therefore have been buried before that day, for there was no mention of him after it.

The judge asked quickly what was the date of Downton's murder.

"We have it here, my lord," replied Lincoln, with a look of relief, which showed his labours were ended. "Mr. Downton was murdered in the night of November the twenty-fourth, four days at the least after Sir Harry was buried, which I submit is

sufficient proof that the deed was not *his*. There are some other questions to ask which may perhaps suggest a reasonable guess of *whose* it was. You have told us," he continued, turning to the box, "that since you have had the care of that book it has only been examined by one individual, and that he was occupied with it long enough to put you off your usual guard?"

"I have said so, and I swear to it again."

"Have you ever seen that stranger since?"

"I see him now. It was that man in the dock."

"Do not swear hastily. Some years, you say, have passed, and we have had witnesses who were puzzled by the dress."

"The dress is very different from that which he wore when I last saw him, but the face is the same, and I still most solemnly swear to him."

The witness went down with no further question.

"I believe, my lord, I need not contend that the person who stole away the date of Sir Harry's death must be the same who charged him with the subsequent crime."

"That is for the jury's decision, and here is something to assist them. Amongst these relics recovered by the witness Daunt, are the identical articles referred to in the prisoner's letter to Mr. Seymour: a half-melted watch, a gold miniature case in the same state, and the fragment of a gold chain."

The proofs against Cheek had come too thickly to be warded off. He struggled for another protest,

but his words failed him, and he dropped down senseless. A long, low cry from pent-up agonies reverberated through every heart, and the multitude burst into another stunning shout. Proceedings were suspended for many minutes, during which the privileged company on the bench again crowded with congratulations and assistance around the unconscious Lucy, but no attempt could be made to carry her out, for there was no carriage and no one to send for it. Thus were they doomed to stay for the last exhibition that Cheek ever made at Lympton.

As soon as he recovered his senses, Lincoln intimated that his case was closed. Sergeant Heavyside, finding the truth too strong for him, retained his seat, and both of them declined to address the jury. Nothing remained but the judge's summing up, which, though he took infinite pains to prevent the murder actually committed from affecting the verdict on the one attempted—the only charge on trial—so protected the witnesses to the latter, that all doubts of their truth were completely dispelled. Cheek hardly appeared to listen, for all his faculties were lost, till he quivered at the word "Guilty," and reeled to and fro under the solemn preface to the sentence, which concluded with "Transportation for life."

Here Lincoln again rose with an appalling air of not yet having done his worst.

"My lord," he said, "I have now to mention a circumstance on which I forbore to question the

witness Daunt, under the impression that it was only necessary for your lordship's after-consideration. An information has been laid before the mayor and magistrates of Dover, that the prisoner did, at the date of the certificate we have produced, and at that place, commit a wilful murder upon John Downton ; and officers are now here with a warrant to take possession of him on that charge."

"Of course ; let them do so."

The horrors that had been accumulating over Cheek's head had now deepened into their darkest shadow. The last prospect in life had closed upon him, save one too terrible to look upon, and he was borne out in a state of despair, which none who saw it can ever hope to forget.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A S Cheek was conveyed away the court cleared hastily to witness his final departure, and the bar rose up, and the judge bowed and took his leave. The sheriff and the lord-lieutenant and their friends again bowed their congratulations, and Lady Goldfield and Mary Lightfoot were nearly the last to think of moving, for they still supported Lucy, who, with closed eyes and clasped hands only knew that all was over when Lord Goldfield entered to receive the emphatic embrace of his mother. He came to tell her that Tom Philpot had brought the carriage, which they would follow on their horses ; but that Mr. Bloomer and his kind friend, who had filled the place of Lucy, were too much exhausted for further exertion. Crowley had taken them to the inn, from which enough company was departing to leave them the best accommodation, and would bring them to Goldsworthy in the morning, when a night's rest had strengthened all parties for a blessed meeting.

They then assisted Lucy slowly to the court-

yard, where Tom could only whisper his joy as he handed them into the carriage, and through a storm of huzzas they were soon clear of the town.

Much of their way was passed in silence, for Lucy was more in a state for consolation than rejoicing, so mingled was the vindication of her father's name, with natural emotion at his now no longer doubted removal from all care for it. Had he but lived, she at length moaned—had her lost mother but lived—one day of restored prosperity to know that they did not leave her so very forlorn, how blest would any fate have been in all this world! What was now the recovery of all that they had lost but a never-ending reproach for possessing it in their stead? What could she do but re-unite them where neither would have sense of it! What poor return for so much love! What vain amends for so much misery!

"I will go!" she exclaimed more quickly. "I will not rest. I must bring the little that remains of him, and pray that his spirit may follow it. He shall be honoured in a tomb not nameless nor deserted. To-morrow—I will go to-morrow!"

"Hush, Lucy; you shall go—so will we all; but not till you have life to reach him. You must not leave to other hands an office so due from your own. You must be patient till you are better able to perform it, and sure that I will counsel no needless delay in what I would have done myself. You have no strength but in your heart, and must regain it by more calm reflection. Heaven knows,

my dear Lucy, how I loved my parents and my husband, but would I recall them if I could to a life, which however happy, must still be one of less perfection? Would I wish them to return for inevitable troubles and die a second death? If that were a right wish how could I have lived so long to feel it vain? The happier I lived with them the more happiness I am bound to find for others, or the less is my chance to be happy with them again. Think if there are not those whom unreflecting grief would wrong, even as it would wrong the memory of those whose example we reject. Remember the power which this day has placed in your hands, and do not imagine it has been placed there to purchase desolation for yourself, or despair for those who love you."

To follow faithfully the persuasive comforting of Lady Goldfield, would need her voice, her look, and other mystic influences, to be felt but not described. The loving attempts of Mary Lightfoot were lost in tearful admiration, for she had known through that long and eventful day what griefs of her own had been resisted to spare their infliction where there were already too many; she was aware of the last night's discoveries, and that whilst she was cheering Lucy through the long hours in the court, she was thinking them the last in which she was likely to appear as the mistress of Goldsworthy, and the last in which she would be seen by the friends who had admired and courted her for so many years. Even as they drove up to their so-

called home, not the least of her fears was whether Lady Goldfield really possessed one.

Lucy was taken to her room, where cautious nursing and gentle words succeeded by degrees in bringing her to a more resigned contemplation of her new position, and ere long her worn-out energies gave way, and she sank into a blessed sleep.

Lady Goldfield then left her to be watched over by her faithful companion, and descended to her son, and his no less faithful, Tom Philpot.

"Mother," said the former, meeting her with anxious affection. "You look sadly fatigued! The day has been too much for you."

"Then let us not talk of it—we have all of us too treacherous a path before us to be safe in looking back."

"Goldsworthy is safe, mother—Mr. Badger only accepted your commission to prevent you from placing it in other hands."

She listened with a look of great relief, and then turned to Tom, and said—"The news is welcome to me for more reasons than you think of. My agent here is a prosperous old man and has long wished to retire, and we owe you much that needs no mention. I am sorry that the office is not better worth your acceptance, but the present occupant has gained a fortune in it, and perhaps we may make it more valuable. You will not refuse me? You will never leave us?"

Tom was too much surprised to answer, and

looked from side to side for an explanation of this new turn of Fortune's wheel. Had his old calculations proved right, and were Cocker and Bonny-castle all wrong? Did pretty Polly's hundred a year when added to his own hundred and fifty, really amount to an income of sixteen hundred !

Lord Goldfield puzzled his arithmetic a great deal more. He saw immediately what service Lady Goldfield desired to acknowledge, and burst out, to evade the subject, that he, too, was in distress for an honest agent, and honest Tom was exactly the person to displace his present rogue at Tantara, who had been brought there by his intimate villain Cox.

Tom turned round and round again—Tantara was a princely place, and the addition it made to sixteen hundred would have confused the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

“These new appointments,” said Lady Goldfield, who had long been informed how far pretty Polly would be concerned in them, “remind me of another which was made by dear Lucy in her last words before she went to sleep—‘Mary,’ she murmured, ‘Mary, the hapless Cheek is disposed of; Broome Warren needs a better manager, and I will take no recommendation but yours.’”

Tom’s calculations were over! He would never make another! What his replies might have been we will not endeavour to repeat, for he did not know himself.

“And now, Harry,” continued his mother, “you

begin to know that there are better roads to happiness than you found on the race-course."

"Mother, my dear mother, you shall judge from my first commission to my agent. Tom, I beseech you, hold yourself in readiness for a speedy visit to Tantara Castle—announce a great sale of thoroughbreds, and dispose of every cursed skeleton for whatever he will fetch."

"I have only one more word, Henry, before I follow my girls to rest. For what cause did you hurry so madly after Mr. Pinhorn?"

"To secure my bills, which he told us last night were in his possession. To prevent him from selling them at half price to his brother swindlers, and bringing I know not what troubles on the head of their lawful owner. I pursued him to his inn, and found him already packing up for London—the dread of another appearance in court made him strictly conscientious, and here I deliver them to Miss Longland's agent—to her, and to her only, are due my sixty per cent. compound interest."

"You give me hopes that you may still be a man of business. Good night, my son. Good night, Mr. Philpot. You had better apply for Broome Warren before Miss Lightfoot appoints some one else."

And thus the long dreaded day was brought to an end.

In the morning Lucy was more herself. The lamentations of last night were for a sorrow for which she had long been prepared, and it could not naturally have been so intense now had her loss

been certified at the time of its occurrence. There was something in the reflection which appealed to her reason and strengthened her efforts to descend and await the party from Lympton.

It was not long before the hale jubilations of a noisy old gentleman announced their arrival, and the Vicar broke from the custody of Crowley and Mr. Badger to burst in and clasp his beloved niece. He was greatly renovated since his exhibition of the day before—his hair did not stand on end, his dress gave no hint of Bedlam, and his flush of triumph made him look at least twenty years younger.

“ It is I that have done it all ! ” he cried. “ Me that none of you believed ! Me that you hunted in a straight waistcoat ! Me that you advertised in the ‘ Hue and Cry ! ’ Me with my wonderful memory of Roger Seymour ! Here, take her, you Crowley, and tell her we’ve had tears enough. I’ve earned my right to give the first blessing all around me, and begin where it is most due.” With which he turned to Lady Goldfield with terrifying compliments on her great penetration in having thought he might be so securely trusted in London, and from her to every one else with the boast of his travels in foreign lands, his perils on sea and shore, prisons, galleys, and captivation of the noblest woman in France !

“ But where is that lady ? ” inquired every one, for next to himself she had been their greatest wonder.

Mr. Badger now found a moment to be heard, and

to tell them with much regret that Madame having considered her mission accomplished, had made up her mind to return home, that she might not be required to intrude where she was quite sure of feeling herself *de trop*. She had taken an affectionate leave of her *bon ange*, and was, by that time, far on her journey ; rejoicing, no doubt, that she had contrived to steal away without her thousand pounds reward for the apprehension of that run-away *brave*.

Lady Goldfield was truly disappointed, and declared that since Madame would not come to see her, she should most certainly go to see Madame. Then observing that Lucy and Crowley had retreated to a blazing fire, and were casting papers into it as fast as Tom Philpot could hand them whilst Lord Goldfield was struggling and protesting and the rest were looking on ; she spoke of the projected journey to Boulogne and its melancholy object, inviting Mr. Badger, as an old and valued friend of Sir Harry, to bear them company. A duty indispensable, he replied, and he would be there the first to make all needful arrangements.

We rest for three days, when the Vicar's good angel found she had not escaped, and received a visit which she never forgot. Before the month ended she had given up her business at Calais and changed her residence and society for a style which no one could account for.

By this leap of a month we pass over a gloomy procession, which, as it neared Broome Warren was

joined by sorrowing multitudes far greater than we witnessed at the never-forgotten assizes. It is too late in our history to describe it farther, and nothing is so pleasant in a midnight tunnel as the ray from the vista at its end.

And yet, we know not why it is, but we believe we are not singular in finding it more difficult to write of joy than of sorrow, just as the painter finds it easier to draw ill-favoured lineaments than the lines of beauty. Perhaps it is that sorrow is an old, familiar acquaintance, and joy—alas ! But we must not chant a dirge to the accompaniment of wedding bells, of which we hear a faint sound in the distance ; but stop to listen to its music.

We resume our pen for a few lighter historiettes, of which the foremost heroine must be sister Pen, premising that we had not heard of her for many weeks, when our principal group were enjoying a bright sunshine in Goldsworthy Park. On which occasion Neddy the Second was seen galloping towards them with Miss Pen's butler mounted on his tail. Mr. Sprat was bearing a dispatch from foreign parts, addressed by that lady to Miss Mary Lightfoot ; and as he had received another for himself with the information that, being good for nothing, he might go about his business, he spared neither whip nor kick to transact a little with his other mistress. Making his way with his best jockeyship towards our group, of whom he judged Miss Polly must be one, he charged through them and pulled up a hundred yards beyond, from whence he re-

turned politely, apologizing for "this here jackass, that ain't got no mouth at all."

Accosting Polly, he delivered his dispatch from the post office, in his hat.

"If you please, mum, here's something from Miss 'Lopy, who has been and turned me off without no warning, and I wants a place."

A letter from the fond sister Pen at last,—the first since Polly had left her. She broke the seal, and found it dated from Amsterdam.

"MY DEAR SISTER,—

"I hope you will now be satisfied. After a long and heart-rending conviction that my devotion to you can meet with no return, I have determined to release you from further discomfort. The awful step is taken, and my designation is no longer spinster. I know not whether it is yet decorous to allude to such an event, but I lose no time in acquainting you that I was six weeks ago espoused to the best of men.

"I trust you will never know the misery of having wrecked all my earthly happiness, and that you will not afflict yourself with anxieties more than you can help, for I am, as yet, in the enjoyment of as much serene content as I think consistent with propriety. Having no further occasion for our late residence, I beg you will get rid of it as well as you can, and give Edward to that worthless boy, Sprat, as a liberal equivalent for his wages, unless you prefer keeping him for your own riding,

in which case you will please to alter his name to Reuben."

"She signs her own name," concluded Polly in great surprise. "There could be only one best man, and that was Neddy Fozzard."

"Ax your pardon, mum," said Sprat; "there's another as is better,—him as I made a Christian with a mess of pig's fry; a cousin of hern as we seed at Cheek's trial."

"And not a bad substitute either," agreed all.

"But how is this?" enquired Tom, who always liked Sprat because he liked Polly. "Do you say Miss Pen has turned you off?"

"Yes, Master Tom, neck and crop."

"Why, then, you must come and live with me."

"Thank'e, sir, all the same; but I should like to give Miss Polly fust choice."

"To be sure, Sprat," replied Polly, pleased with the compliment. "I could not spare you. Pack up everything belonging to me at the cottage, and do what you please with Edward."

"Thank'e, mum; I know what to do with him. I'll have all the things ready afore night. Good-bye, ma'am. Come up, you brute, and run away home."

With which Neddy resumed his acquaintance with Mr. Sprat's heels, and was exceedingly well disposed of on his way back for the sum of five shillings to an itinerant dealer in pots and pans.

As soon as the incessant calls of other visitors,

with every variety of compliment, and curiosity became sufficiently exhausted to permit an occasional drive, the first was directed to the Rosary, in which was found a very desirable revolution. Mrs. Too-good had surprised the neighbourhood and herself by adhering all that time to her resolution of leaving the world to shift for itself, and reserving all her good advice for private meditation. Society, which had reluctantly kept aloof from the grinding out of its flaws, very soon began to attach itself to her really estimable qualities; and she was not long in convincing herself that the best method of doing good was to do it rationally. The gratitude of Lucy for her long affection and now unneeded generosity—and, for her sake, of all at Goldsworthy—was shown in unremitting attention through the heavy months of winter, considered due to the memory of Sir Harry; and it was from the parterres of the Rosary that Crowley and Tom Philpot presented the first flowers of the spring to adorn two bridal chaplets.

Mrs. Bloomer comes next in rotation, and we are happy to say, as the Vicar was to hear, that having left Broome Warren the day after her distinguished assistance at the assizes, she became a leader of the *ton* at Rosherville, and celebrated as the better half of one of the happiest couples that ever parted.

Mrs. Whilk took precedence of all at Sea Cliff as a lady who bought instead of catching her fish, and never after shot a wild duck, though the frequent visits of her benefactors made it necessary to keep

a good house. Nelly, made perfectly independent, passed a few months with her, and only left for a happy marriage with a young custom-house officer, who raised her to a rank she well deserved. And Bunckle, having taken Father Matthew's pledge, was promoted to the command of a beautiful yacht, newly chartered for the summer dreams of we need not say what voyagers, with our little friend Tom for his first-lieutenant.

Dame Rokins was established in a capital farm, very near to the Chase, under the superintendence of pretty Susan, and the sweetheart to whom a slight but significant allusion was made by brother Jack in one of our early pages; whilst brother Jack's erratic education made him fit for everything, but nothing in particular.

Charming Betsy continued to enjoy the confidence of her mistress with much increased indulgence in consequence of her horrible abduction by Sergeant Anak, during which time she discovered the other sergeant who had rescued her to be her first cousin, and obtained leave to invite him to the Rosary at all meal times. She afterwards married Dr. Choke who declared Mrs. Choke's relative to be the best friend he had.

This is a long list, but we must not omit Mr. Fozzard, who was so unpopular after the fraudulent sale of the Chase, that his eminent principals were under the necessity of requesting his retirement. He afterwards employed his great literary talents in the begging letter business, till he inadvertently

made acquaintance with the police, from which time we regret to say we have completely lost sight of him.

Moses Pinhorn being, it is supposed, like his cousin, the late Sir Abraham, in doubt whether he is likely to change for the better, still lives in Dan Street, Beersheba Square, where he continues his correspondence, though nearly a hundred years old, with young officers of good prospects, who occasionally express their obligations to him in the Court of Bankruptcy: we likewise find mention of him sometimes by a misguided *Pater Familias* in the *Times* newspaper, with very irate denouncements. But *Pater Familias* may as well save his time and temper, for the rising philosophy of the day is all in favour of *Post Obits*, and Moses will be a thriving old gentleman till he goes into business somewhere else.

We have kept Aaron to the last, because we have been unwilling to weave a dark thread in what we have intended for a bright drop-scene, and because the end of his story seems to assist the moral which he has himself once or twice drawn in a passing word on the responsibility of masters for the conduct of dependents. After the trial at Maidstone, which needs no repulsive allusion, his powers of endurance, which had been strained to their utmost tension, gave way with a suddenness which proved his wondrous fortitude. He had been so injured by his daring exertions in Cheek's fire, that nothing but his single and determined purpose of atonement

seemed to have kept him alive. He had only succeeded with almost his last breath, and had barely enough to request his conveyance back to Broome Warren and a final word with Crowley and Lucy. His time was just long enough to see them and understand the allowance they made for his great wrongs, and the sorrow they felt for him when his mind wandered away about undeserved pardon, and babes and daisy chains, and left what he had done amiss to be answered for by those who had done worse.

We have never visited the Broome Warren country since the days of which we have given this history, but we hear it is now entirely reformed. The Chase is restored to its former beauty; the site of the mansion in Green Lane's End is no longer to be traced, and the vicarage and the church bear witness to the love that has been lavished on them. Here, on its grassy knoll, the resting-place of the ill-fated Lady Longland now bears an additional inscription to the memory of Sir Harry, who rests by her side; and here will be read other inscriptions in their turn, which we are thankful to say has not come yet.

And here we come to our terminus, and take the liberty of waking our fellow-traveller with whom we commenced this long journey, trusting, very sincerely, that he has enjoyed a pleasant repose.

THE END.

